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YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS

A Boarding School Mystery for Girls

BY

EDITH BISHOP SHERMAN

1955 m
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THE SUN DIAL PRESS, INC.
NEW YORK

1937
THE SUN DIAL PRESS, INC.

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TO

MY FATHER

WHO ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD

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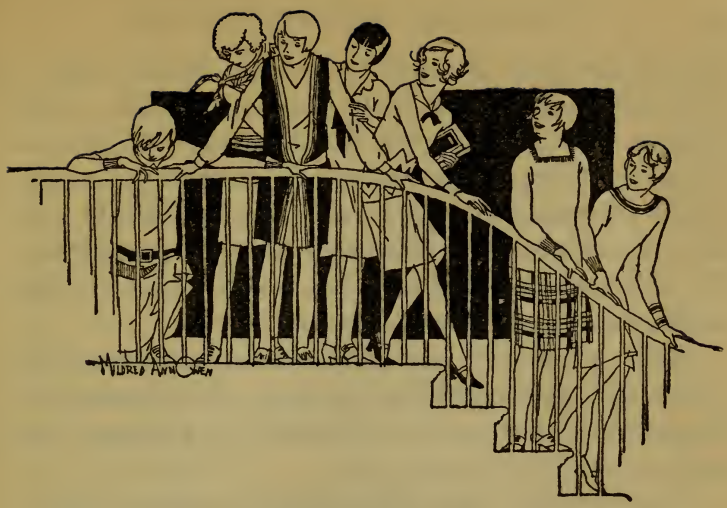

CHAPTER I

HARWOOD HALL

IT WAS one of the warmest days of summer, and Jonesville, during July, knew what a warm day could be like. Blazing sunshine beat down pitilessly upon the dusty streets of the little Mid-Western town. Even the dogs, usually so ready to run out and bark at every passing vehicle, sought the shelter of store awnings and regarded the world with torpid indifference. Only the waving cornfields which stretched away from town in every direction seemed to appreciate the intense heat. "Good corn weather," people would sigh to each other when they met.

Carlisle Martin, however, scarcely noticed the heat as she hurried home from the butcher shop. Little beads of moisture stood out upon her broad white forehead, where the tiny damp curls clung like a halo above

it; but she sped on, oblivious to the listless steps of other pedestrians and their surprised glances at her haste. One man, crimson-faced, though he was protected by a huge, flapping umbrella which he carried, called after her jokingly; but although Carlisle knew he was a friend of her father's, she paid no attention. For the postman must have reached her house by now and the *letter* must have arrived!

"Did it come?" she asked excitedly, opening the screen door to the porch with a jerk and allowing it to bang behind her as she plumped her package down upon a cretonne-covered table.

Mrs. Martin, pale, hollow-eyed, her face drawn by one of the sick headaches to which she was subject, opened her eyes wearily. Her thin figure, stretched out upon the porch hammock, should have elicited at least a glance of pity from her daughter. Carlisle, however, though usually more considerate, did not look at her mother, her gaze seeking, instead, the mail box beside the door.

"Did what come, dear?" asked Mrs. Martin, after a pause. Her eyes, stupid from pain, caught a glimpse of the meat juice oozing through its paper wrapping onto the new cretonne. She wished sickly that Carlisle would notice it, would be more careful. But she did not admonish her. It was too much of an effort.

"Why, the *letter*! You know, Mother, that letter or booklet or whatever they send out from Harwood Hall to prospective students. I sent for it—don't you remember, Mother?" Carlisle's impatience was obvious.

"Oh, that!" Consternation made Mrs. Martin frown. "Why, Carrie dear, I forgot that you had sent for it. I'm—I'm afraid I gave it to Bobbie to play with. He's coloring the pictures in it. I'm so sorry!" Her voice trailed away into exhausted silence.

Carlisle stared disbelievingly. "You gave that to Bobbie!" Her voice shrilled with anger for an instant, then something about her mother's inert form stilled the anger. "But you knew—you knew, Mother, I had sent for it!" went on Carlisle quaveringly. "You signed your name to the letter I wrote, asking for the school catalogue!"

Mrs. Martin, her eyes still closed, shook her head remorsefully. "I know, Carrie dear—I remember, now! But I truly forgot and thought it was only an advertisement. And as I knew your father would never consider letting you go away to school——However, suppose you run up to the playroom and see if Bobbie has it? You can easily coax it away from him if you want the catalogue for anything."

"Mother!" Again that hot wave of anger threatened to engulf Carlisle. "Why did you think I sent for it if I didn't want it! And why do you say that Father will not consider letting me go away to school? Other girls' fathers do! Why should I be the one girl to have to stay at home and drudge and slave and never—"

"Oh, Carrie dear!" begged Mrs. Martin. She groaned in real agony. "Do let me be quiet for awhile, please!"

"—never have a good time like other girls!" fin-

ished Carlisle passionately. "There isn't a girl in this town who has to work like I do, not one! Housework, day after day! I tell you—it's horrible!"

"Please!" murmured Mrs. Martin once more. And at last her white lips, the black circles beneath her eyes, brought realization to Carlisle, sent a remorseful stab through her young heart. She muttered something and flung into the house, leaving the meat to ooze quietly through its wrapping onto the table where, hours later, it was discovered by Mr. Martin and taken to the ice box.

Everything about her home irritated Carlisle that unfortunate morning. Away from the cool orderliness of the screened porch, which Mrs. Martin had managed to "pick up" before she had been forced to lie down upon the couch-hammock, the sight of the hot, disorderly rooms when she went indoors smote Carlisle's vision like so many blows.

"I wouldn't mind if I really liked housework—Prissy Smith does! She loves to help her mother, just loves to clean and bake and cook! But I don't! I hate it, I loathe it! I hate everything about a house! If I could only get away! Or if only Mother understood how I felt—or if she cared! But she doesn't! She doesn't care a bit." Morosely, Carlisle tramped up the front stairs. Dust lay in thick layers upon the stair treads, smudged by Carlisle's brothers' dirty boots; dust covered the stair rail; a gray blur of it had settled over the furniture. This was no discredit to Carlisle or her mother, for the hot drought which made for "good corn weather" had dried the dirt roads of

the little town so that every passing motor car would send great clouds of it drifting in every direction, and housewives lamented in vain.

The unmade beds, as she passed her mother's room, the boys' room, were silent reminders of the work Carlisle had so gladly postponed to run the errand for her mother that morning. Now they irritated her beyond measure. By the time she reached the playroom, a little den at the back of the house, she was in no mood to be patient with her small brother. Instead of the coaxing diplomacy Mrs. Martin had advised, then, Carlisle stalked over to the little boy and snatched away the catalogue he was contentedly daubing with paint. He cried out in protest.

"You shouldn't have asked Mother for it!" stormed his sister. "It was mine! Bad boy!"

Bobbie looked up at her through angry tears. "Mummie said I could have it!" he wailed loudly and beseechingly.

But Carlisle had marched away, and soon his angry shrieks were countered by the tempestuous slam of her bedroom door. Downstairs, Mrs. Martin sighed.

The morning wore on. Somehow, the beds got made in a haphazard fashion with the wrinkles left in them and the pillows untidily placed. Somehow, too, the rooms downstairs got dusted—hastily, it is true, with articles thrown back into the hall closet, so that rubbers and caps and baseball bats were in a jumble upon the closet floor. Luncheon found a silent, moody daughter facing a pale, pain-haggard mother, watching her across the table.

Carlisle's brothers, John, fifteen years old, Anthony, thirteen, and Quin, twelve, came in silently, ate voraciously, and silently departed. During the summer months, being ambitious lads, each had a job, John working in a bank, Anthony in a grocery store—to Carlisle's secret dissatisfaction—while Quin caddied out at the golf links. The meal ended unpleasantly, for Bobbie suddenly remembered his grievance against his sister and, casting a sullen glance at her, commenced whining to his mother to "make Carrie give me back my pictures!"

Carlisle, piling the luncheon dishes in the kitchen sink, heard Mrs. Martin patiently explaining to the little fellow, "It's Sister's book, dear. Mother will get you another."

Carlisle decided to leave the dishes until it was cooler, trailed listlessly upstairs, and, throwing herself upon her bed, became immersed in a library book until midafternoon, when a loud ring of the front-door bell sent her scurrying to the head of the stairs to listen. Presently Mrs. Martin called her.

"Carrie, Kitty Evans and Margaret Dale are here Shall I tell them to come up, dear?"

Carlisle sent a hasty look around her disorderly room from the doorway, whither she had retreated. An organdy dress, worn to a church festival the evening before, still lay over the chair where she had thrown it, white shoes and stockings were upon the floor where she had stepped from them, hair clung to the comb and brush upon her overcrowded dresser top, a crumb-laden fudge plate called three or four flies to

her desk, her bed showed traces of dust where her shoes had lain when she had reclined there, reading. A mental vision of Kitty Evans's big, lovely home, of her beautiful boudoir, as Kitty liked to call it, of the two maids Mr. Evans employed, of Kitty, herself, cool, neat, pretty, swept before Carlisle's eyes. No, certainly Kitty could not be invited up here! Nor Margaret Dale either!

"I'll be right down, Mother!" she headed them off hastily. How she wished she had had the energy to dress herself sooner, had not wasted all of that time reading. Downstairs, she could hear her mother ushering the unexpected guests back to the porch, knew how much Mrs. Martin would have liked then to have gone upstairs, for Kitty and Margaret were chatterboxes, and the poor head demanded quiet. Carlisle frowned. Hateful day! And how she wished her mother would not call her "Carrie!"

Ten minutes later—a long ten minutes to Mrs. Martin—she appeared in the doorway, a cordial smile upon her face. Her quick glance took in Kitty's and Margaret's smart sport dresses, their gay stockings and trim sandals, and went back dissatisfiedly to her own modest gingham, the plain white stockings and shoes. But an instant later she had plunged into vivacious banter, knowing it was her jolly laughter, her piquant remarks, which had attracted Jonesville's two wealthiest girls that afternoon, and not her shabby background. After all, clothes weren't important.

"Going away for your vacation soon?" Carlisle asked Kitty in the course of the conversation. Her

gaze drifted out to the big roadster by the curb. How she wished Dad could afford a car like that—what fun to drive it, to take long trips in it as Kitty and her father did, what fun to possess all of the material comforts Mr. Evan's wealth could and did bestow upon his motherless daughter! Then her attention suddenly centered upon Kitty's answer.

"No," the other girl was saying rather complacently. "Dad says if I go away to school this fall he's going to have me home this summer, and he can't get away. So Aunt Sara and I are concentrating on clothes—just simple things, of course, for Harwood Hall only allows that sort, with a uniform to wear on Sundays to church."

Harwood Hall! Carlisle's heart seemed to skip a beat at the words.

"Are you really go-going to Harwood?" she stammered.

Kitty cast an amused glance at her chum. Her lifted eyebrows seemed to point out the envy Carlisle was struggling to conceal—envy "thick enough to cut like butter," as Kitty told Margaret later. But she nodded quietly now.

"Yes, I've won Dad over to my way of thinking at last. I tried to, last year, when Margaret went. This will be her second year, of course. However, I expect to make up for lost time on fudge parties, midnight suppers, and all the pranks going!"

And then followed an amusing recital from Margaret of the good times at Harwood Hall. The critical ears of an older person might have detected the

romance spread on rather obviously for the benefit of her wide-eyed listeners. But Carlisle was not critical. To her youthful imagination nothing had ever been so alluring, so wonderful, as the opportunity presented to these lucky girls before her. Even the arrival of her mother, pale but smiling, with a tray upon which rested tinkling lemonade glasses and plates of home-made cookies, brought forth no sign of appreciation. She passed the dainty embroidered napkins absent-mindedly, too absorbed in what she had just heard to notice that they were her mother's cherished best ones. She smiled vaguely at the guests' enthusiastic praise of lemonade and cookies, waved good-bye almost indifferently when they finally departed. Perhaps if she could have heard Kitty Evans's half-sad, half-envious remark when she left, "Think of having a mother like Carlisle's!" Carlisle, herself, might have thanked her mother when she went into the kitchen from the front door and found the luncheon dishes she had left in the sink all washed and wiped and Mrs. Martin mixing bran muffins for supper. As it was, she sank silently down upon a kitchen chair and stared ahead of her with moody eyes.

"Have a good time, dear?" asked Mrs. Martin tenderly, glancing up.

Her face clouded when Carlisle frowned and burst forth, "Oh, Mother, both Kitty and Margaret are going to Harwood Hall this year! Why can't I?"

Mrs. Martin sighed as she turned to place the pan of muffins in the oven.

"Mr. Evans and Mr. Dale are both wealthy men,

Carrie," she answered gently. "And men with but one child apiece, instead of five. Besides, dear, neither Dad nor I are sure that it would be the best thing for our only daughter to go so far from home, even if we could afford to send her. What can Harvard Hall offer you that Jonesville High School cannot?"

"Harwood, not Harvard," corrected Carlisle absently. Drumming her fingers in a discontented fashion upon the kitchen table, she spoke as so many young daughters are apt to, when she answered her mother's question. "I don't suppose *you* can understand, Mother, how Harwood Hall differs from Jonesville High School. But I assure you," Carlisle's lip curled, "there *is* a difference!" Then, as Mrs. Martin hid a smile in the oven as she adjusted the muffin pan, Carlisle rose and turned upon her heel. "Well, I'm going to show Dad the catalogue from Harwood to-night, anyway. No harm in that!" she flung over her shoulder, stalking into the dining room to set the table for supper.

"No, no harm in that!" echoed her mother, glancing through the open door at the slim, drooping figure. If only Carlisle could be satisfied at home, could spread some of the sweets of her gayety over the monotonous bread and butter of family life!

That evening, with rather a self-conscious air, Carlisle, catalogue in hand, approached her father's easy chair. He listened patiently, for he, too, loved his young and only daughter tenderly. But after she had presented her plea to go away, had shown him the ad-

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vantages Harwood Hall could offer, how comparatively inexpensive it was, he shook his head.

"Carlisle dear, what would Mother do without you?"

Carlisle looked across the porch at her mother, patiently darning socks beneath an electric lamp.

"Why, just what Margaret Dale's mother does without her, what Mr. Evans does without Kitty—get along without me!"

Mr. Martin shook his head. "But who would help Mother and ease off some of the heavy load of housework she is carrying?"

Carlisle flushed a deep crimson. "But that's just it," she burst out. "Why should I have to give up this best time of my life to help Mother?" Mr. Martin's keen eyes, however, saw that there was no disrespect in her face, though her young voice was rather bitter. "Now is the time when I ought to be learning things—not just housework! Why can't you get Mother a maid? Other people have maids."

Mr. Martin shook his head again regretfully. "Can't afford it, Carrie," he said in a rueful tone. "Not in this day of eighty- or ninety-dollar maids! It would be utterly impossible for me to afford an item like that!"

And Carlisle went, heavy-hearted, to bed. She had noticed that her mother had not said a word, had not helped her to persuade her father at all, and she told herself sullenly that her mother did not care! That was the trouble, thought Carlisle bitterly. Nobody seemed to care!

The days drifted by, one exactly like another in its heat and its monotony. The routine of housework, even the routine of pleasure—one evening at the movies, one afternoon at the Van Hattons' elaborate garden party, another afternoon helping Mrs. Noble, the neighbor next door, serve the chicken salad and the melting ice cream and the sticky chocolate cake to her fellow members of the Titania Literary Club—all were utterly alike, it seemed to the discontented girl. There were no dances for Carlisle now that the high school had closed for summer vacation, for Mr. Martin could not afford to belong to the country club, and she was not asked by anyone else. Many times she saw the Evans's roadster speed past, the Dales' big car following headlong, full of laughing young people. She did not know that Kitty and Margaret had tacitly agreed to drop her from the crowd.

Sometimes she felt she could scream at the unvarying monotony of it, and she wondered desperately what secret for happiness her mother possessed which kept her so good-humoredly darning boys' socks, making johnnycake because Dad liked it, eternally picking up after Bobbie, after Quin, even after Carlisle herself.

Then one day Carlisle found that life could be kind after all; that the long, arid stretches of monotony were apt to have garden spots spring up unexpectedly. Mrs. Martin came quietly into her daughter's room one morning soon after the postman's shrill whistle had been heard.

"Carrie dear," she said simply, "I've sold that lot out near Highland Park that Granddad left me. You

are going to Harwood Hall this September. I want you to be happy, little daughter. I want you to feel that Mother does understand and love you more than——" Mrs. Martin's voice broke momentarily. Carlisle half realized the sacrifice her mother was making in spending in this way the little money she had. "I want you to feel that Mother loves you more than anything—not anyone, dear, for there are the boys and Dad; but more than any mere thing in the world—including the money Granddad left." She hesitated. "I've asked Cousin Nellie to spend the winter with me," she went on, after a brief pause. "She will help with the housework and the boys, so that Dad will feel that you can be spared. I have already spoken to him about it."

"Oh, *Mother!*" was all that Carlisle could say.

But long after her mother had stolen away, she stood looking silently, entrancedly before her, not seeing the mirror she was polishing, not seeing the ecstatic face staring back at her, seeing instead a great dining hall, seeing herself slipping into her place at the dinner table with a shy greeting to the dignified teacher in charge. Mother had understood after all; Mother had arranged it! She was really, truly going away to Harwood Hall! It seemed almost impossible for her to believe it.

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER GIRL FOR HARWOOD HALL

RENÉE looked at the faces around her, then her eyes fixed themselves incredulously upon the thin, scholarly face of her grandfather's lawyer and lifelong friend.

"My grandfather was worth as much as that? And he left me all?" she asked clearly.

The lawyer nodded. "Practically all," he answered. "Over one and a half million. A big sum of money for a small girl." He smiled down at her. She did, indeed, look very young and very small in her black dress, seated in a huge armchair.

But Renée drew herself up. "I'm not such a small girl any more," she told him, with raised eyebrows. "I am almost fifteen, Mr. Chartres."

The group of older people smiled at each other. Renée's cousin, Mrs. Maynard, leaned forward and touched her shoulder.

"Mr. Chartres says that I am to take care of you," she said brightly. "You are to come and live with me in Denver. Won't that be nice?" And she beamed upon the girl.

Renée, however, looked at her in silence. She did not agree with Mrs. Maynard that it would be at all

nice. For one absurd reason, Mrs. Maynard was too fat! And Renée did not like fat people—perhaps the contrast with her thin little self was too great. For another, Mrs. Maynard had a large family, three or four fat boys and two very uninteresting daughters with whom Renée, upon one of her flying trips across the continent with her grandfather, had not been impressed. But how could she tell Mrs. Maynard that? She shrugged her shoulders wearily and moved her gaze to Mr. Chartres's fine countenance. He smiled at her kindly before he gathered up his papers.

"Now, my dear, if there is anything I can do for you, just let me know," he said. He got to his feet and looked slowly around him. What a wonderful place it was, this D'Auberville mansion, with its great drawing rooms, its wide air-swept halls, its high ceilings and French windows through which could be seen the iron railings of the balconies that were everywhere! Now the blinds were drawn to shut out the hot Southern sunshine; but there was a soft green light that allowed Mr. Chartres to peer across the library at the big oil painting of old Colonel D'Auberville hanging over the mantel, at the other portrait of his stately wife, Madame D'Auberville, and the smaller painting of his son, Renée's father. There was none of Renée's mother. It was obvious that she had not counted much in the lives of those aristocratic, autocratic old people, that she had counted only in the life of their son, Pierre, and then but a pathetically short time.

Renée, however, by some queer trick of fate, looked

like her grandfather, though of course she did not possess the white hair, the fierce white mustache and goatee that showed in his portrait. She had, though, the same black eyes, the high cheek bones and straight nose and thin lips of the D'Aubervilles, and doubtless, thought Mr. Chartres whimsically, the temper which descended from generation to generation of that family. The old lawyer hoped, with an inward sigh, that the girl would prove docile. It had been so fortunate that Mrs. Maynard had offered her a home! Really very fortunate! His manner showed none of these thoughts, however, as he bowed himself and his clerk out of the room and the house.

When the various distant relatives—people whom Renée had never seen, who had appeared out of another world, as it were, for the reading of her grandfather's will and, satisfied with their various bequests, were now congratulating Renée solemnly and unenviously—were departing, the girl drew a long breath and turned to Mrs. Maynard, who alone remained.

"Now," she said, running over to a victrola which stood, all too modern, in a corner of the beautiful old room, "now let's have some music! I feel stifled!"

"Oh, no, no, Renée!" Mrs. Maynard's voice was properly horrified. "Your grandfather's funeral was only yesterday!"

"But yes!" insisted Renée. She snapped a record onto the music disk, started it twirling tempestuously. "Grandfather would be the first to tell me to enjoy myself after this dreadful day!"

Then, as a wild Hungarian waltz pealed forth from

the machine, she threw herself into the dance. Faster and faster played the music, faster and ever faster flew her slim figure, sliding, gliding, whirling, arms now tossed wildly above her head, now drooping listlessly from her shoulders, yet always the poignant music's true interpretation in Renée's motions. For all her disapproval, Mrs. Maynard gaped in fascination at the amazing grace of that flying figure, while beyond, beneath the wide arches, drawn like bees by honey, gathered groups of colored house servants, their delighted grins and rolling eyes showing the pleasure that became vociferous applause when the music stopped and Renée dropped breathlessly into the nearest chair.

"Dat-a-way, honey!" "Doan yo' evah fo'get youah dancin', Miss Renée!" "My lan'—yo' shuah good danceh, li'l' missy!" "Kin yo' do hit agin, honey?"

But at that Renée jumped to her feet, became, too quickly for Mrs. Maynard's dull perception to grasp at once, the young mistress of the D'Auberville mansion.

"I won't do it again! Go back to your work, Sam! And you, too, Marie! I didn't call any of you! Go—do you-all heah me!"

A stamp of her feet sent them scattering into the halls. When she was alone with Mrs. Maynard, Renée walked slowly over to look up at her grandfather's portrait, sudden tears in her eyes.

"That wasn't nice of me, Granddad," she apologized, almost as though he were alive there before her. "Death's such—such—a dreadful thing, isn't it!" She turned away, stared uncertainly at Mrs. Maynard, as

though for sympathy, like a very little child. But she got none.

"Death is too solemn a thing to be treated so lightly, Renée," returned Mrs. Maynard pompously, missing the look in the girl's eyes. "I wonder," she went on after a suitable pause, during which Renée moved restlessly about the room, "I wonder if dinner is nearly ready! I do hope," she finished anxiously, "they have it a little earlier than they did last night. I fear the housekeeper is lax. I do like my dinner early!"

Beside the window, staring out into the garden, Renée suddenly clenched her hands beneath the folds of her black dress. All at once she knew she disliked this fat woman who was eternally thinking about her stomach. She did not answer. And Mrs. Maynard, gazing at her stubborn little back, grew troubled. The girl, she was beginning to be afraid, was going to be a problem in her little family in Denver. She was queer, moody, like that dancer mother of her's whom Cousin Pierre had married in France and brought home to his surprised and indignant parents. But their indignation had soon turned to bitter grief, for a few months after Renée's birth, both her parents had been instantly killed in a runaway accident. Then, a few months later, old Madame D'Auberville had quietly died, and the Colonel, bereaved, had turned helplessly to the tiny Renée for company. What wonder, then, that her baby hands had twined themselves so lovingly around his heart, that he had carried her and her colored nurse, Aunt Pinky, all over the world

with him in his lonely journeys, that, when he had died, he had left his little granddaughter all his wealth?

"That money," thought Mrs. Maynard shrewdly, "will do much!" She had a sudden gratifying vision of her stodgy sons being sent to college on it, with a grateful Renée insisting upon its being used so, of a shabby household being bolstered up on it. So much could be done!

"I really like my dinner in the middle of the day, though it *is* old-fashioned," continued Mrs. Maynard, complacently unaware of the sharp gaze Renée had now whirled around to bestow upon her. Started upon her favorite subject, she droned on and on.

"And I shall have to hear her, day after day!" thought Renée passionately. "Day after day and year after year! Oh, that I cannot do! I cannot grow to be satisfied if there is chocolate pudding for dinner one day and apple pie for dessert the next. I had rather die or—or run away!" Renée caught her breath. Run away! Why not?

So that is why, when it was long past midnight that night, a little figure stole out from behind the oleanders in the D'Auberville grounds, scuttled down the drive to the great iron gates where she let herself silently out onto a deserted avenue. Silvery moonlight flooded the neighborhood, cut into black shadows the tropic foliage that shielded the privacy of the big mansion.

As for Renée, she did not stop to consider that she was a D'Auberville, that she was doing a thing no D'Auberville had ever done before—running away!

She was only a frightened, bewildered little person, whose sole desire was to escape a situation which frankness could so easily have changed.

Afar off, some great church bell boomed the hour—two o'clock. Renée shivered with excitement. Never before had she been out and abroad at that hour. She visualized the bedroom she had just quitted, with its canopied bed, its old-rose tapestried furniture. Beyond had been the white-tiled bathroom, with everything there as shining as Aunt Pinky could make it.

Aunt Pinky! Renée suddenly stopped short. How could she have gone without saying good-bye to Aunt Pinky! Although her old colored nurse had been asleep in Renée's dressing room, she had forgotten her, had stolen from the bedroom without one parting glance at the faithful dusky face. But now her alert young mind told Renée that she would be risking detention should she return to bid Aunt Pinky farewell, that the old woman would do all in her power, as a matter of fact, to prevent Renée's flight.

So off the girl started, trudging mile after mile. Soon her back commenced to ache, the pound of the warm pavements crept into the swing of her walk. Poor little rich girl—she had been cherished into such a fragile sort of person that the tramp into the city exhausted her. Once she had to dodge into the shadow of someone's gateposts while a blue-clad policeman sauntered by, swinging his nightstick. And once a big dog ran barking out at her.

Late—or early—as it was, when all good citizens were supposed to be slumbering, the night life of a

great city was stirring. Here and there were bright lights, people were still abroad, and once in awhile Renée, passing an entrance, could hear music and the sound of gay voices inside.

Four o'clock found her wearily trudging up a narrow street of the old French quarter, a street that finally led out into Jackson Square, where she crossed to the center to sink down upon the grass and stare at the cathedral, lovely beyond description in the moonlight. But suddenly Renée was snatched out of her contemplation of it rather rudely when she felt a furtive hand plucking at her shoulder. She turned, in disagreeable surprise, to find an evil-looking old woman staring at her—an old woman who must have crept forth from some hidden street near by.

"Silk, eh?" cackled the old woman in a high, shrill voice, her thin, bony hand seeming to burn into the girl's shoulder as she continued to grasp it.

Renée squirmed indignantly, meditating flight. Then, forlornly, she wondered where she could go. True, she had money in her purse, left intact since that day when her grandfather, a white, still burden, had been carried back into the house he had just quitted for a year's traveling. But now the girl knew that there was no train leaving until morning and that it was better for her to remain hidden than try to seek shelter in the station waiting room. At last, however, a pull at her purse made her spring to her feet, facing the old woman.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Renée furiously.

For answer, the old dame sniveled. "Nothin'," she whined. "Be'ant you'll goin' to he'p a poor, old soul?"

Renée hesitated. She was naturally generous; but the old woman had overstepped her bounds. "No," said the girl firmly. "I am not."

She stopped abruptly and jumped aside as the old woman, muttering angrily, suddenly raised the umbrella she was using as a cane and, with unsuspected agility, made a lunge at the girl. Then Renée, throwing dignity to the winds, turned and ran, pursued by the hag's shrill tones.

For all her fright and dismay, however, something in Renée thrilled with excitement. Why, this was like a fairy tale! But she was overcome by weariness. Somehow, she doubled on her tracks and passed the old French market twice. Shorn of its booths, of its chattering crowds, it was a forlorn spot. But the girl, spying at last a recessed doorway in the market, staggered toward it and, sinking down upon the warm doorstep, fell instantly asleep.

She was awakened by the door being opened and a good-humored voice asking her, in French, to move. It was morning, she discovered, and now the market place was alive with bustle and excitement. The stands which had stood empty now blossomed forth like giant bouquets with their yellow carrots and red beets, with their redder peppers and the green of corn and spinach.

Passing out of the French quarter once more, she discovered Canal Street thronged with people in the

bright sunshine, crowded with honking motor cars and clanging street cars. She stopped an elderly man to ask him the direction to a railroad station and, glancing briefly at her, he told her. But almost immediately she became confused. Absurd as it was, she really was more familiar with the Strand in London, with the boulevards of Paris, the market place at Cairo, and the many wharves at Hongkong than with the streets in her native city.

Renée was just debating the possibility of asking someone else for directions again when, looking up, she saw Mr. Chartres staring at her from her grandfather's car. With an excited gesture, he leaned forward to speak to the chauffeur, and, before she knew it, the big machine had slowed down at the curb and the old lawyer had hopped out and was holding both her little hands in his.

"Dear child!" he said breathlessly, and, glancing up sullenly, Renée was surprised to find tears in his faded eyes. "I'm so glad we found you! Your grandfather—how could I be happy knowing I had failed in his trust! You—you were left in my charge—ah, my dear, why did you try to run away?"

Renée, conscience-stricken for the first time, was opening her lips to tell him when an angry voice broke in.

"Yes, tell us, miss, what you mean by running away!" panted Mrs. Maynard, snatching at Renée's arm with pudgy fingers and pinching it as she tried to shove the girl toward the waiting motor car. "What do you mean, I should like to know? A nice night

we've spent! If you were my daughter you should have a proper trouncing!"

"But she is not your daughter!" said the old lawyer sharply. He was staring at Mrs. Maynard, all at once, as though he were seeing her for the first time. "Let us get into the car. You—er—look very weary, Mrs. Maynard!"

Something, then, in his suave voice made Mrs. Maynard conscious of her disheveled appearance. Her fat face, really pale and puffy from fatigue, flushed. But she bit her lips and followed Renée and the lawyer to the car, climbing stiffly in ahead of them when the latter made a courtly bow, full of irony.

"Aunt Pinky missed you almost at once, Renée," explained Mr. Chartres, as they started for home. "We have been searching for you all night long."

Renée, seated between her two elders, stirred restlessly. "Why did you care?" she asked defiantly.

Mr. Chartres was silent. When he spoke, his voice was very husky. "Your—your grandfather was my true friend, Renée," he said, "and I want you to be happy, my child."

"It will not make me happy to live with Mrs. Maynard," blurted out Renée.

"Well, the idea!" began that outraged lady.

"I felt that she did not want me for myself!" explained Renée simply, turning to Mr. Chartres.

"But, my child," he said in a puzzled tone, "surely you understood yesterday that it was optional with you, that you were to go with Mrs. Maynard if you liked.

Could you not frankly have said that you preferred other plans to be made for you?"

"I did not understand," said Renée.

"Other arrangements must be made, of course," said Mr. Chartres musingly. "There are schools. Boarding schools. Especially there is one run by my dear friend, Miss Luval. It is called—let me see—what is its name?—it is called Harwood Hall."

CHAPTER III

JULIE

ALTHOUGH it was a hotel room, it revealed both wealth and good taste. Soft draperies barred glaring seashore sunlight, there were fluffy cushions upon the chaise-longue, obviously not supplied by the hotel, there were expensive antique gold articles upon the dressing table, some deft hand had placed framed photographs here and there, flowers here and there, to give a touch of home. It was, in short, a room in which to be very happy. But the little face glowering back at Julie Austin from the dressing table mirror was not a happy one. The lips turned downward too much for that, the eyes studied with moody intentness the pattern of the rug beneath Julie's slippers, two fat tears rolled forlornly down her cheeks.

"Ready, dear?" asked a soft voice from the adjoining room.

Julie started and wiped the tears away hastily. "No, I'm—I'm not ready, Mother. Oh, what's the use—I don't want to go out! I'm too sick of it!" she answered huskily.

"Sick of what, dear?" There was the sound of footsteps, a rustle of silk, and Mrs. Austin stood in the

doorway. "Sick of what, Julie?" she repeated solicitously.

But Julie only shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't like to see that pout, my daughter," went on her mother gravely. She crossed the room and seated herself upon the mahogany bench beside Julie, to put her arms around her and draw the resisting little figure toward her. "Now tell your mother!" she commanded gaily.

Julie's smile was reluctant; but it was a smile, nevertheless, for Mother somehow had a way of getting what she wanted.

"I don't know how to tell you what's the matter, Moth', because I hardly know myself. It's just that I'm sick—of all this!" She waved a vague hand around the room. "I'm sick, too, of having nothing to do but get dressed to meet a lot of people I don't care about, sick of having them stare at you and me as though we were sort of curious animals. But most of all," Julie's eyes were again fixed upon the rug; but she felt her mother's slender figure grow tense beside her, "I'm sick of not having a real home. Oh, Moth'," she twisted around upon the bench to stare eagerly up into Mrs. Austin's face, to clasp imploring hands, "couldn't we have a little house somewhere? I wouldn't care how little it was or how poor if it were only a place all our own. Oh, I would so love to take care of it, to keep the dishes arranged upon their shelves, to have everything bright and clean and shining and know I had worked to keep it so! Couldn't we, Mother? Couldn't we?"

A shade had crossed Mrs. Austin's face as she sat silently listening. "Julie dear," she answered, "I've often thought of a little home of our own. This is not the kind of life for you, not the kind I would have chosen had I been free. But you see, Belovedest, I'm not free! I must go where my work calls me and—oh, I cannot bear to leave you behind, you are so precious to me! And upon my work depends not only these things," she paused to lift a gold-backed hairbrush, "but our bread and butter, Julie."

There was a little silence. Julie understood as well as though her mother had refused her outright, exactly how impossible the little dream house was; but she sighed rebelliously.

Mrs. Austin rose briskly. "Come," she said, "I have an appointment at three with Mr. Trask. That leaves just a wee bit of time in which to dress, Julie, so hurry. I'll dictate a few letters to Miss Markham while I am waiting for you."

She disappeared into her own room, and soon Julie heard her busily dictating, heard Miss Markham's occasional low questions, and afar off, through the soft draperies, the roll and murmur of the Atlantic Ocean, many feet below her hotel window. But she did not move for awhile. She was, as she had said, utterly sick of it all, sick of the luxury that only seemed to smother her, sick of the hurry and of the bustle, of engagements that only meant more engagements, sick, most of all, of the work that engrossed her mother's life, which took them from one part of the continent to another. Julie—although she would not have ex-

Later, in the elevator, Julie caught the usual curious glances

pressed it thus—was only a helpless piece of driftwood, swept along in the swift current of her mother's busy life.

Later, descending in the elevator, the girl caught the usual curious glances at Mrs. Austin and, also as usual, resented them bitterly.

"You'd think we were part of a side show!" she told herself furiously. And so indignant did she become that she stepped very rudely in front of one woman as the other was about to exit into the hotel lobby, giving an insolent little shrug when the other gasped in anger. Mrs. Austin noticed the incident, and a half-frown came into her eyes.

"Julie is growing spoiled," she thought, in her turn. "I must decide what to do about her."

They both overheard scraps of conversation that buzzed and eddied around them as they passed quickly through the lobby. "Yes, that's Gail Austin!" "Her daughter? Oh, she's too young to have a girl that big!" "Gail Austin! Beautiful, isn't she!" "They say she's worth a million."

Gail Austin smiled rather grimly at the vast amount of wealth she was supposed to have accumulated. "If they only knew!" she thought amusedly.

Settled in the limousine which was bearing them up the shore front toward another great hotel where Mr. Trask was stopping, she turned to Julie.

"A penny?" she said gently.

"Not worth a penny, Mother!" The girl shook her head. "I was just wishing—oh, the usual one of a little house—somewhere!"

"You never forget, do you, dear!" Mrs. Austin sighed. "Things are too uncertain with me, Julie! While I am able, I must be free to work. Someday, when I'm old——"

So Julie relapsed into her sulky, moody thoughts, her deep silence remaining unbroken during the hour they spent with Mr. Trask in the bright garden of the Hotel Trayville. Mr. Trask was her mother's business manager, a fat, fussy, little man who was perpetually wiping his shiny face with an immaculate white handkerchief. Upon him much of Gail Austin's success had depended, however.

Julie heaved a sigh of relief when her mother at last rose to her feet and unfurled her sunshade. Beside Mr. Trask, the little girl thought her mother more beautiful than ever, with her tall, slender figure, with her great, dark eyes and soft, black hair and her lovely mouth that, upon the silver screen, could twist into such a quaint, whimsical smile that people smiled involuntarily in answer, sitting in the darkness of hundreds of cinema theaters.

"Let's walk back," coaxed Julie. So the limousine was dismissed and they swung off up the great boardwalk that stretched along the Jersey coast for miles. Julie forgot her boredom in the joy of having her pretty mother all to herself for awhile, in the invigoration induced by every breath of the clean, sea-swept breeze.

But the next morning Julie woke to the sound of rain beating against her bedroom window, blown in from a sullen, gray sea. She had barely rolled over

for a second nap when her mother entered and surprised her by being dressed for traveling.

"Come, up with you, Julie Austin!" she smiled.

"Why, Moth', where are we going? I thought we were going to stay here a month!" protested Julie. She sprang out of bed, nevertheless, and began groping for her clothes. There was something twinkling in her mother's eyes which meant a "surprise" in some form or other. And all her life Julie had loved "surprises."

"You have barely twenty minutes to get dressed, with perhaps fifteen for breakfast, which I have ordered for you, Julie," announced Mrs. Austin mysteriously. "Wear your blue suit and bring your raincoat."

Julie hurried; but never did buttons prove so tantalizing, hair so obdurate as upon that morning. "Oh, bother, why doesn't Hannah come in and help!" she exclaimed impatiently. But the staid, middle-aged maid was busily packing a suitcase and could only grumble over the piles of silken wearing apparel.

"Sure you have everything in, Hannah?" Mrs. Austin was asking crisply when Julie at last rushed into her mother's room. "That'll be all, Miss Markham," she nodded to her secretary, who, notebook in hand, at once rose and left the room. "Well, Julie, ready?" She turned with her usual loving smile to her young daughter.

Half an hour later Mrs. Austin leaned forward in her chair that stood beside Julie's in the parlor car which was bearing them swiftly up the Jersey coast toward New York.

"Not even a glimmer of curiosity yet?" she asked quizzically.

"Well, I know you wouldn't tell where we're going until you got good and ready, Moth'," returned Julie calmly. She was gazing at the seashore village through which they were rolling—a desolate place of ramshackle summer cottages, forlorn in the rain, a main street lined with little stores, then bigger houses beyond, toward the shore line and farther still the heaving gray mass that was the storm-swept Atlantic.

"All right, since you are not at all curious, I shall tell you for spite. We're going up to Connecticut to see Aunt C'listie!"

At that, Julie was surprised out of her calmness. "Not the place where you go, sometimes, and never take me!" she exclaimed. Then, at her mother's nod, she went on breathlessly. "But why have you never taken me there, Mother?"

Mrs. Austin did not look at her daughter, seemed to evade the question. "It's never been convenient," she answered carelessly. "Do look at those boys in wading! Wouldn't you think they'd hate to get soaked, as they will in this hard rain!"

"Why, they have their bathing suits on!" giggled Julie.

"So they have!" smiled her mother, who was rather near-sighted.

So Julie was deftly switched from her question, and when she thought of it again, she dared not broach the subject, for her mother's face wore the little sad frown that the girl knew meant memories of those hard years

before Gail Austin had achieved success, when Julie had been a baby and actual starvation had sometimes been near them.

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They lunched at a delightful place in Greenwich Village, an old part of New York City. It was a quaint restaurant occupying three narrow old houses which might have been new and luxurious when Washington's young officers came to dance the stately minuet there. Now, the three houses had narrow doorways built into the adjacent walls and after one had scrambled through a crowded little entry into a fairly large room lined with benches and tables, one could choose which house to dine in and so obtain entrance through the adjoining doorways. The kitchen, together with a queer, little coffee room, where you asked for coffee through a hole in a door, was in the basement, and the food, deliciously hot and served, save for the soup and dessert, upon one big plate divided into four sections, came up on dumbwaiters.

Julie and her mother, after luncheon, took a short walk across West Fourth Street and saw odd little shops where artists worked and sold their wares and, in many cases, lived. They passed other quaintly named restaurants, and finally went on toward Washington Square where, beneath the great arch, they hailed a taxicab and rode up Fifth Avenue to Forty-second Street and so across to Grand Central Station.

It was dark and still drizzling when they reached what Julie thought was their destination. But to her surprise, her mother went into a telephone booth and telephoned to a local garage. Before long, a rattling,

be-curtained Ford drove up to the curb, and they went out and climbed into it. Speeding out through the Connecticut hills, leaving the lights of the little town shining mistily behind them, Julie shivered with the cold and the damp that blew in between the curtain cracks. Mrs. Austin tried to cover her with her own coat and uttered an impatient exclamation when the car, at the top of a long, hard climb, suddenly wheezed and stopped dead.

"I wish," she leaned forward to say, "that the garage had sent a decent car!"

The chauffeur, a merry-eyed, frank-faced young fellow, looked up with a friendly grin before he climbed out and went forward to the engine hood.

"A wedding used up all the cars," he explained good-naturedly, "so Granddad had to send this, with his apologies. But I'll soon have her jumping."

He was as good as his word, and in five minutes they were again bumping and rattling over the country road. Julie, peering out through the isinglass in the curtain, saw an old graveyard, unkempt, lonely in the night and the rain, and turning to point it out to her mother, was surprised to find her mother leaning forward also gazing at it, tears in her eyes, her sweet mouth quivering. But soon the old graveyard was left behind, and with a last grand flourish and some snorts from the laboring engine, they ran across a little bridge and stopped before a wide-flung door, through which the yellow lamplight poured to welcome them.

"So this is my girl!" welcomed Aunt Calista, when Julie had stumbled up the old stepping-stone walk,

straight into her arms. She kissed Julie's mother and nodded kindly to the young chauffeur who was following them with the suitcase. "Put it right down there by the door, Thad. How's Granddad? If you will go and see Samanthy, in the kitchen, you'll find what you like. Waffles!" she said, turning back to her guests. "Thad loves 'em!" she laughed.

It was not until she had eaten the last mouthful of Samantha's waffles, not until she had consumed innumerable mugs of thick, yellow milk, that Julie said what, all along, she had been thinking.

"Why, Moth'," she exclaimed, "why, this is home, isn't it!"

She looked up aghast to see her mother's dark head go down suddenly upon the table, heard, with terror, her mother sobbing, all at once, as though her heart were breaking, saw Aunt Calista get up from her seat and go around the shining old mahogany table in the candle light, and gather Gail Austin into her ample, loving embrace. But no one explained anything to Julie, and when, presently, her mother was her own calm self again and rising, she took Julie's hand in hers, tarrying only to ask, "the same room, Aunt C'listie?" the girl began to feel as though she were in a dream. But she went along quietly, undressed hurriedly, and crept in beside her mother, in the great four-poster bed, to fall instantly asleep beneath the soft coverlet and achieve real dreams.

The next morning the sunlight, falling across her face from an uncurtained window, wakened her. To her surprise, her mother's place in the bed was unoc-

cupied, and she dressed quickly, half-vexed to have been left behind. But her mother met her upon the narrow, uncarpeted stairs and kissed her gaily.

"See what I've found!" she said happily. "A darling little turtle!"

Julie, glancing at her sidelong, wondered. Could this be her stately mother, this smiling, short-skirted, youthful person who could be so excited over finding a turtle? Then, suddenly and wisely deciding that she liked the change, she demanded the whereabouts of more turtles and raced her mother down to the quiet brook which, winding around Aunt Calista's place, emptied itself into a mill pond beyond.

As the happy hours passed that first day, so a whole week drifted by, and soon it was two weeks since they had driven up to the friendly, wide-flung front door.

They were at tea, a quiet Sunday night tea, when Mrs. Austin looked across the table at Aunt Calista, looked around the dim, clean dining room, with its old blue china in the corner cupboard, with the roses nodding in their pure white bowls on serving table and supper table alike.

"Peace!" she sighed. "The peace reflected by a happy life, Aunt Calista!"

"But not always peace, my dear," returned Aunt Calista gently. She looked for a troubled instant back into the far past when a beloved brother had come home from the Civil War to die, when a sweetheart had never returned from that dreadful war, thought of the anguish and the loneliness which had been conquered bravely, so that peace had returned to the old

house. And looking into that past, she dismissed it and returned to the present, her wonderful smile like a benediction upon Julie and her mother. "When are you going to tell the child, Gail?" she went on significantly.

Then, as Julie's mother glanced up, panic creeping into her eyes, Aunt Calista slightly shook her head. "I mean about the school," she said.

"Oh!" Mrs. Austin looked at her daughter. As she commenced to speak, her fingers nervously crumbled a roll; but her voice was serene. "Julie dear, I'll tell you, now, why we are here. I wanted Aunt C'listie to help me solve the problem of you. When you were little, a nurse took care of you—you were not a problem then, for you could be carted around like—like our luggage," she laughed shakily. "I mean, one place was as good as another, for all you needed, then, was lots of fresh air and sunshine and good food. But now—" Mrs. Austin paused, went on huskily—"you need more than those things, my little girl. You need, not only schooling, but friends of your own age and the wise and constant guidance of some good woman who has the time which I lack to spend upon you. So—" Julie's mother cleared her throat, glanced across the table at Aunt Calista, and seemed to gather confidence from her steady, kindly gaze—"so we have decided, dear, to send you away to a school—Harwood Hall. It is run by a wise and charming lady—a Miss Luval—a cousin of Aunt C'listie's, by the way. And——"

"But, Moth'!" burst out Julie passionately. "But I don't want to leave you! I don't want to go to this Harwood Hall! Please—I—I—don't want to!"

Helplessly, Mrs. Austin glanced at Aunt Calista, saw the words "be firm" upon her lips, and she turned back to Julie.

"Why, my little girl—you will love it there," she said reassuringly. "It's where I went, years and years ago, to school!"

"Did you, really, Moth'?" Julie glanced at her through her tears.

"Really, truly, dear!"

"We—ell," Julie sniffed, wiped her eyes. "Well, all right. Do you think they'll have stationery with 'Harwood Hall' engraved on it, for the pupils to use when they write to their mothers?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mrs. Austin. She smiled at Aunt Calista. It was as though a thunderstorm had passed over, with the sunshine creeping back reluctantly. " 'Harwood Hall' will look well on the envelopes."

"Ye-es," said Julie.

CHAPTER IV

BARBARA DECIDES

BARBARA GAINSWORTH was staring idly out of the window. The yellow, foggy afternoon, typical of November in London, was drawing to a close, and Barbara was glad. Dinner time meant that her father would return to the great hotel in which they were living, meant that after a day of comparative loneliness and solitude—for old Martha, her maid, was a silent person—there would be heartening companionship, happy chatter on Barbara's part, and grave, kindly listening on his.

Barbara shivered a little, now, as she turned away from the window, although, contrary to English custom, the big, luxuriously furnished room in which she was standing was steam-heated. But there was a coal fire, too, crackling in the grate, and wandering over to it Barbara folded up her tall, thin figure upon a low hearth stool and, sinking her chin into the palms of her hands, stared into the flames.

How long ago, she mused, since they had bidden good-bye to the friends and relatives upon the New York pier and had steamed away to Europe with the dear mother who had been destined not to return with them. Barbara's dark eyes filled with tears. Queer

it was, and lonely without her, without, after years of the hundreds of loving duties and cares she could perform for her mother, despite the constant presence of cheerful Miss Brent, the trained nurse who had sailed with them! Miss Brent had at last packed her steamer trunk, had kissed Barbara briskly and had shaken hands with Mr. Gainsworth, and had gone back to America, for her work had been done.

"Too bad, Babs," Barbara's father had said soberly, as Miss Brent's capable back had disappeared through the door of the Continental train which would take her to her port of embarkation, "for I fear you are going to be too much alone! I rather wish we had persuaded her to stay! It's"—he sighed—"going to be pretty lonely without your mother."

Barbara, however, had shaken her head. Her tall, lanky figure, so like her father's, had straightened itself determinedly.

"I'm glad Miss Brent's gone—really, Dad!" she had answered cheerfully. "Now you and I can be together. Mother was different—you and I and Mother—well, that was *us!* But you and I and Miss Brent"—Barbara had shaken her head again—"no, that's different!"

Father and daughter had threaded their way through the crowded turmoil of the Gare St. Lazaire toward an exit, sidestepping the darting, blue-smocked porters with their great loads of baggage, hanging from straps across their shoulders, avoiding placid family groups gathered together in intimate circles, regardless of how many walked around them, ignoring

wildly gesticulating taxicab drivers as they walked toward their limousine.

"But you'll be alone more than you count on, dear," Mr. Gainsworth had gone on, in a troubled voice, when they were seated and speeding back to their hotel. "Even Paris," he had glanced out smilingly at the shops they were passing as they rolled down the Rue de l'Opera, "can be lonely, you know! Business will claim me again—and when we get to London, I fear you'll hardly see me except at dinner time."

"That's better than listening to Miss Brent talk all the time," Barbara had retorted curtly. She had smiled whimsically. "Why are trained nurses so apt to be talkers?" she had wondered.

Mr. Gainsworth had smiled, too. "Maybe because they have the other fellows at their mercy," he had suggested with twinkling eyes. Then he had sobered, returning to the original subject. "But, seriously, Babs, don't you think we had better send for one of the cousins to keep you company over here? Mary or Katherine? It will be at least four or five months before we can start for the States."

Barbara, however, had declined this suggestion. "Oh, no, Dad," she had said quickly. "I'd much rather not! I'll be all right—don't you worry about me!"

Her father had worried, of course, and Barbara, in spite of her cheery words, had been very lonely indeed during the ensuing months. Once or twice Mr. Gainsworth had suggested obtaining a governess; but that, too, the girl had vetoed. Her companion-

ship with her invalid mother had kept her from meeting people, had made her unfortunately self-conscious and shy, so that even the idea of a governess, of someone with whom she must talk, be polite to, associate with, filled her with aversion. So that finally that suggestion had been dropped.

Martha, the elderly, hatchet-faced maid who worshiped Barbara, as she had the invalid mother, was too old and too timid to be a very interesting companion upon sightseeing tours. So Barbara, upon the Continent, went upon short trips with her father's secretary, Mr. Farley, whenever he could be spared. This was not often, however, so that there were left long, gaping days when all the girl could do was to stroll out with Martha and enjoy native sights and people as best she could in the interesting foreign cities. There might have been social entertainments, had Barbara been older, for Mr. Gainsworth, an important business man, as well as delightful personally, had friends everywhere. But since she could not participate, Barbara's father had declined all invitations, so that his young daughter had enjoyed his society at least every evening, from dinner time on. Barbara, squatting upon her low stool before her London fire, thought back to those evenings—lovely ones upon the edge of Lake Geneva, at Vevay, gorgeously cool ones at Interlaken, with a view of the snow-tipped Jungfrau in the moonlight from their hotel veranda, the afterglow stealing across the sky at the Lido, near Venice. Yes, Barbara had some

happy memories mingling like jewels through the drab silver of the other times.

There was a stir, now, at the door. It was quite dark; but Barbara, raising her eyes, could see a vague form hovering respectfully upon the threshold. "Miss Barbara?" said Martha's inquiring voice.

"Yes?" Barbara yawned, stretched. "Here I am, Martha. Time to dress for dinner?" she added hopefully.

"Oh, no," replied Martha, in a voice habitually gloomy. "It's dretful foggy out—that's why you think it late. No, indeed, Miss Barbara, it's jes' barely four o'clock. You want I should bring you up some tea?"

"Tea?" Barbara, who had sunk back listlessly upon her fireside stool, shook her head. "No—no, thank you, Martha." Then, as a disappointed silence permeated the room, she glanced up. "But you go down and get some," she added kindly.

Martha's face, reflected in the firelight as she stood near Barbara, brightened. "Thank you, Miss Barbara," she said almost cheerfully. She turned toward the door, paused. "Shall I light the lights for you?" she asked, her hand lifted toward the electric push button.

Her young mistress, however, stayed her outstretched hand. "No, Martha. I like just the firelight," she answered quickly. Then, as the old servant closed the door, Barbara's eyes fell to studying the flames once more.

It was fully four hours later that the elevator doors,

clanging in the corridor outside the Gainsworth apartment, announced the arrival of her father. At the sound of his brisk steps Barbara, who had been dressed and waiting for at least two of the four hours, sprang to meet him and was gathered into his bearlike embrace until she cried out for her tulle ruffles.

"Been waitin' long, Babs honey?" he asked, giving his hat and coat to the manservant, Banks, who had appeared from an inner room. "Oh, Banks—don't bother—I'm not going to dress to-night for dinner! Too tired, Babs," he explained heavily, wearily, as Banks inclined his head gravely and disappeared.

Mr. Gainsworth walked to an easy chair beside the fire and sank into it with a sigh.

"It seemed a long time, Dad," said Barbara, in her dry, clipped voice, hanging onto his hand. He drew her to the arm of his chair. "But now you're home it's all—all hunky-dory." She laughed.

"Didn't you get my message saying I'd be late?" asked Mr. Gainsworth concernedly. "I told Farley to call you up a couple of hours ago."

"So he did. But I was hoping the message was wrong," replied Barbara ruefully. "But now you're home, let's not bother about the waiting part!" And she gave the hand she held an affectionate little squeeze.

"Ring that bell, Daughter, and tell Martha to have dinner served up here," directed Mr. Gainsworth presently. He sat with his other hand over his eyes, as though very, very tired, indeed.

"Oh, Dad—that will be nice!" And Barbara

jumped to her feet to obey him. Then, returning to her seat upon the arm of her father's chair, she added, "It's so much cozier than downstairs, among all the strangers and the lights and the confusion of everyone getting served—though of course the music is nice!"

"Don't feel equal to that restaurant to-night, Babs," repeated Mr. Gainsworth. "You see," he went on after a little pause, "I was trying to finish up a lot of business because——" Here he paused again, while his eyes began to twinkle. His daughter gazed at him breathlessly.

"Oh, Dad!" Barbara jumped to two excited feet, her hands clasped, her eyes suddenly shining. "Don't tell me! Let me guess! *We're going home!*"

"Next week," nodded Mr. Gainsworth, his tired face beaming. "Farley got us all reservations on the *Cavonia,* and we sail Tuesday!"

Barbara's rather sallow face flushed with joy. Her usual curt speech became almost broken.

"Oh, Dad! Home! Think of it! Oh, Martha!" And clapping her hands, fairly carried out of her usual staid young self, she spun around and around upon her toes until, nearing the door, she collided with the entering Martha and, seizing her by her elbows, spun her around too.

"Stop! Stop, Miss Barbara! Have ye clean lo-lost your sen-senses!" gasped that poor woman bewilderedly, wildly trying to clutch at her cap and her slipping apron straps. But Barbara, for a moment, was not to be stopped. Despite Martha's panting gasps, her imploring glances at Mr. Gainsworth, who sat

laughing at them, she was relentlessly whirled around and around while Barbara chanted ecstatically, "Home! Home! Home!" until they both brought up reeling against the door casement, and poor Martha helplessly began to adjust her apparel, dividing reproachful glances between Mr. Gainsworth and her young mistress. At last, however, the meaning of Barbara's excitement penetrated her slower intellect, and she ceased plucking at her apron strings.

"What did you say, Miss Barbara?" she demanded sharply.

"Home, Martha! Don't you understand! We're sailing next Tuesday!"

"Oh, my!" said Martha. And she leaned quite weakly against the door casing. "Home! Ain't that—that nice!" And a slow, pleased smile overspread her face, too.

But her employer's face had sobered. "Why, Babs," he said thoughtfully, "I didn't realize you wanted to go home so much as all this!"

"Neither did I, Dad!" said Barbara, shaking her head, a spot of red upon either cheek. "But, oh," she came across the room to him to stand looking down at him eagerly, "won't it be great to see the Statue of Liberty and the Battery and the Woolworth Tower again!"

"It will, Babs," agreed her father. He sighed. "It's been a long time," he said.

He did not mention the fact that they were returning this time without that dear third companion whose gentle comradeship, while exacting much in the way

of care, had yet given them so much that now she would be sorely missed indeed. But Barbara's face saddened, drooped.

Martha's voice, however, broke in cheerfully. "Did you wish dinner served here, sir?" she inquired with unusual tact. Perhaps a glance at Barbara's face had revealed its meaning to her.

Mr. Gainsworth looked at her with an air of relief. It is good to get back to the commonplace things of life, at times. "Yes, Martha, tell Banks to have it sent up," he answered gratefully.

What a happy time they had over that dinner! Even Banks' saturnine face was wreathed in smiles as he served it. No one but a traveler long banished from the homeland, whether by choice or by force of circumstances, can understand the anticipation, the joyful plans which were made that night.

The next morning, bright and early, Barbara, accompanied by the plainly garbed Martha, sallied forth upon the most delightful of traveler occupations, shopping for gifts for those at home. While she and her father were alone as a family unit, there were plenty of cousins and other relatives in less fortunate circumstances financially, to whom "something from abroad" would be prized indeed. While in Italy and France, Barbara had been too saddened by her great loss to be interested in the enticing shop windows. The lovely leather work of Milan and Florence, the gorgeous beads manufactured at Venice, the wood-carving of Switzerland, the quaint silver filigree jewelry of Holland—all failed to appeal to her sorrowful eyes. But now, with the excitement of

home-going actually upon her, she hailed a taxicab with such a joyous face that its driver, rattling up to the street curb beside her, smiled back instinctively.

Off Barbara and Martha bounced and jounced, then, to Bond Street, that fine thoroughfare of big shops. Up and down its length they went, going into the stores with empty hands and coming out each laden with great armfuls of bundles that they piled into the waiting taxi. It was only when they found that there was scarcely any room left for them upon the taxicab seats that Barbara laughed "Home!" and they returned to the hotel.

"Martha!" How surprised the girl's voice was as she entered her apartment, followed by hotel pages and by Banks, all staggering beneath piles of packages! "Why, I didn't know it was so late! Why, it's five o'clock—almost time to dress for dinner! If only," she sighed happily, sinking down into a chair and letting Martha remove the hat from her weary head, "if only all the days to Tuesday would pass as quickly!"

But alas for Barbara, the subsequent days were fated to drag slowly past, instead. Whether she had too recklessly expended her rather slender store of strength that first day of shopping or whether merely the excitement had exhausted her, is hard to say. At any rate, the morning following her Bond Street expedition found poor Barbara flat upon her back, shivering one moment and burning up with disagreeable fever the next.

"A touch of influenza," said the doctor briskly.

"Better get a trained nurse for her at once, Mr. Gainsworth. No use taking any chances. I don't like that cough."

So the following days were filled with bitter doses and pills, with alcohol rubs that failed to relieve aching limbs and muscles, with dozings that did not bring rest, although the soft-voiced English nurse was efficiency itself. The worst occurred when the Gainsworth bookings on the *Cavonia* had to be canceled, and bitter were the tears shed by the sick girl that day!

At last, however, after a period of languid convalescence, of sitting up with pillows to prop her, of tentative excursions into the big drawing room from her bedroom, the nurse was finally dismissed, ushered out most happily by the jealous Martha, and a very pale, shaky-limbed Barbara was bundled into the limousine, driven to a big steamer in the Thames below London, escorted up the gangplank by her anxious-eyed father, and put at once to bed in her cabin by Martha.

The weather turned out to be wretched, for early December gales tossed the big liner upon the stormy ocean as easily as an eggshell, and instead of the ozone putting color back into his girl's cheeks, as he had hoped, Mr. Gainsworth found both himself and Barbara prisoners below decks most of the time. True, there was a glassed-in promenade around one of the main decks, as well as a glassed-in winter garden; but both were deserted, for the majority of passengers, like Barbara, were too ill to leave their staterooms. All in all, rather than having it do her

any good, the voyage seemed to undermine the little strength she had left, and Barbara had to be taken from the ship and conveyed to the big mansion, in one of the east Eighties, in a private ambulance. Christmas, although she was home in New York, passed drearily, with Barbara confined to her own suite and Miss Brent, hastily sent for, back in charge.

The first of the year, however, Miss Brent left, and a tall, thin wraith of a Barbara began to come downstairs, to wander aimlessly through the big, lonely rooms. For, in spite of his own desires, Mr. Gainsworth, instead of being able to spend his time with his daughter, had to go down to his Wall Street office, called by the business interests which meant thousands of dollars not only to himself but to other men and their families. All this he tried patiently to explain to poor Barbara; but her weakness and her weary convalescence, crying out for relief from the intolerable loneliness, would not or could not let her see his responsibility to other people.

"You *could* stay home if you only wanted to, Dad!" she would weep at one of these pathetic sessions. And so pitiful was she, with the great tears rolling down her wan cheeks, that Mr. Gainsworth would sigh distractedly and wonder why the brain which could manipulate vast operations into money could not solve this difficulty of providing happiness and companionship for his young, still half-sick daughter.

"But, Babs, darling, why won't you have some of the cousins come over and stay with you?" he would

plead helplessly. "Or Aunt Margaret? You used to be fond of her."

Barbara turned her face away. "No, no, no!" She shook her head dismally. "The cousins chatter so! And—and—Aunt Margaret's gotten too uplifting!"

In spite of his worry, Mr. Gainsworth had to smile, for his sister Margaret, with her settlements and her social uplift classes and her clinics, was rather appalling in her brisk assumption that all was well with the world if you only thought so and it was your own fault if you didn't think so!

But Mr. Gainsworth carried a great fear around with him these days, for he thought he could almost foresee that fatal and chronic invalidhood creeping upon Barbara which had claimed her mother.

"It's human society she needs, *young* society," he thought sadly one Sunday afternoon as he and Barbara rolled through Central Park in their luxurious car, with footman and chauffeur sitting stiffly upon the front seat. His concerned glance had intercepted Barbara's wistful one as her eyes rested upon a merry party of young skaters upon their way to one of the lakes, where the red ball was up to indicate skating. "Sometimes I am almost tempted to adopt another child to give Babs the companionship she needs."

He mentioned this latter thought to his old friend Mr. Chartres who, north upon a brief business trip, was having luncheon with him the next day at his club.

Mr. Chartres, however, shook his head. "No, Bob, I think you're wrong. That is too risky a business. It might not turn out well at all—you are so

wrapped up in Barbara, I don't see how there could fail to be unfair discrimination at times."

"Not if the other child were younger—say a little girl of ten?"

But Mr. Chartres only shook his head again, went on sipping his beef bouillon thoughtfully.

"I tell you Babs is simply ailing for lack of youthful companionship," urged Barbara's father. "Poor child—I'm rarely at home, Martha is old and dull. I feel sorry for her."

"So do I, Bob," admitted Mr. Chartres, pushing his empty bouillon cup back. "Has she no friends of her own age? Why, you have relatives, Bob—what about Tom's girls and those children of Helen's?"

"Babs won't have a thing to do with 'em," answered Mr. Gainsworth impatiently. "She says they chatter too much and," he grinned suddenly, "being nice, healthy, normal girls, all of them, they do! They make my head ache when they're around!"

"Wouldn't hurt Barbara to chatter a little more," grunted Mr. Chartres, with the frankness permitted old friendship.

"I know it!" groaned his host. "Don't I know it! But I can't force her, half-sick still as she is, and nervous accordingly, to accept her cousins' companionship. Her very weakness and physical ill health make her smallest protest a law."

"That's bad for both of you," responded Mr. Chartres shortly. "Have you tried out any governesses, Bob? Some nice young college graduate, say, full of enthusiasm?"

"Babs won't hear of that, either," said Mr. Gainsworth, nodding to the waiter. "Squab, Philip? Or Long Island duckling?"

"Long Island duckling," said Mr. Chartres. "Can't get that at home."

Mr. Gainsworth looked at him absently. "No," he sighed, reverting to his problem, "I'm not ashamed to say I'm plain up against it, Phil, about the child, that's a fact."

There was a little pause. Across the big club restaurant came the murmur of men's voices, the clattering of dishes and of silverware. Outside, the gray January day was settling into a snowy one, lazy flakes drifted against the big plate-glass windows. Mr. Gainsworth's eyes rested moodily upon the whitening surface of Fifth Avenue.

"If I could get away, I'd take her down to Palm Beach or Miami for awhile," he went on gravely, then. "But I can't get away just now."

"Why not let her go back to New Orleans with me?" suggested Mr. Chartres. "I don't know what I'd do with her in my bachelor's hall; but she'd be welcome, Bob, for your sake as well as that of dear—Mary's." And leaning over to Mr. Gainsworth, the older gentleman placed his hand gently over the other's as it lay outstretched upon the table.

Mr. Gainsworth looked up gratefully. "I know you would, Phil," he said in an unsteady voice. "I know you would. But New Orleans—no, that's too far away, and I'm afraid of those blame 'northers' you get down there. Babs still has a bad cough."

"Lake Placid might be a good place for her—or Saranac," suggested his friend.

"Too many sick people around," replied Mr. Gainsworth, shaking his head. "Babs would probably get the idea at once that she really was sick, although the clear, cold air is probably what she needs."

"Lake Placid has developed into a splendid winter resort," reproved Mr. Chartres. "Lots of sick people right here in New York, Bob." He was silent a moment, eating his duckling; then he looked up suddenly. "Mountain air would do her cough good. Mountain air!" he repeated. "I have it! Ever think about sending Barbara to boarding school, Bob?"

"Boarding school?" Mr. Gainsworth repeated it with an air of distaste. "No, I can't say that I have."

"It would give the girl the companionship she needs," said Mr. Chartres slowly. "Youthful companionship and varied. She would have to come out of herself—no time in schools for coddling. Force of circumstances has made the child lonely and shy—the healthy, normal life at boarding school might counteract all that."

"On the other hand, the reaction might make her perfectly miserable, might make her withdraw into her own shell even more," protested Mr. Gainsworth rather sharply. It was plain to be seen that the plan did not appeal to him.

"I know a school high in the Blue Ridge Mountains," went on Mr. Chartres simply, as though the other had not spoken. "It's called Harwood Hall. The principal is one of the most charming women I've

met in my life." Mr. Gainsworth looked up at the fervent tone of his friend's deep voice. "She is, I am happy to say, one of my good friends. Recently, I sent a little ward of mine, the granddaughter of old Colonel D'Auberville—you remember him, Bob?—to Miss Luval. Renée is doing well. It is an excellent place, an excellent school."

"Harwood Hall?" said Mr. Gainsworth, struck by the name. "Isn't that the school which used to be called the Mountain Female Institute, Phil?"

Mr. Chartres nodded. "I believe it was," he agreed. "Its name has been changed in recent years."

"Why, then," exclaimed Mr. Gainsworth, leaning forward interestedly, "that's the school Mary went to as a girl! Barbara's mother attended there!"

"That is true!" said Mr. Chartres. "I had forgotten! Yes, that's the one, Bob—a fine school run by a fine woman, a lovely woman, with a staff of good teachers and a trained nurse in charge of the Infirmary. Not," finished Mr. Chartres hastily, "that I anticipate Barbara will be sick down there. On the other hand, I predict that she will begin to pick up as soon as she arrives."

"You make your plan sound very attractive, Phil," smiled Mr. Gainsworth, as he motioned for his club slip and scribbled his name upon it. "Well, we shall see what Babs says. After all, she's the one! You'll take dinner with us, won't you, to-night?"

"Yes, I shall be up to dinner," nodded Mr. Chartres. "And—yes, Barbara is the one to decide!"

That night Barbara turned her thin face from Mr.

Chartres's scholarly one to her father's forcedly cheerful one as the latter proposed the school plan in a pseudo-jolly voice rather belied by the anxious look in his eyes. Contrary to Mr. Gainsworth's expectations, however, and to his enormous relief, the bitter opposition he was afraid Barbara might offer did not develop.

"Harwood Hall?" Her tone was thoughtful. "Mother's school where she went when she was young, Dad?" In the dim candlelight above the shining silver of the dinner table, Barbara's cheeks took on a faint glow. "When would I—go?" she inquired, with unexpected docility.

"As soon as you feel like it, Babs," replied her father promptly, not daring to glance at Mr. Chartres. "I can send you down in the *Lombord,"* he mentioned the name of his private railroad car. "Or else Farley and Martha can take you down—we can easily secure a couple of staterooms. I have that Marley-Seymore deal on, or I'd go with you myself. Marley-Seymore, the big oil people." He turned explanatorily to Mr. Chartres, who nodded.

"If she were well enough, she could go with me to-morrow," that gentleman was commencing, when Barbara's clear voice interrupted him.

"If I'm going, Dad—I'm going absolutely alone," she stated. "I don't want even Martha! And I want to go in an ordinary train. I'm tired of being Robert Gainsworth's daughter, with people staring at me because of your money. I want to go just as Barbara Gainsworth, please!"

Mr. Gainsworth glanced helplessly at his old friend; but Mr. Chartres was smiling at Barbara. "The girl's absolutely right," said Mr. Chartres, in an applauding manner. "Let her go down there and make her own way. She's not Mary's—and your—daughter for nothing!" And he chuckled.

"We-ell," began Mr. Gainsworth. Already, he felt as lonely as though his girl were upon her way.

"Oh, Dad, don't look that way!" cried Barbara, getting up from her chair to run around the table and kiss him, thereby causing Wiggins, the butler, to backstep and to clutch nervously at his silver salver. "I haven't *gone* yet! All the same"—she drew a long breath, looked from one affectionate face to the other—"all the same, I believe it's going to be rather—fun, this Harwood Hall!"

CHAPTER V

THE NEW PUPIL

PEERING out through the windows of the Pullman car, hand shading her eyes so that the dark would not hinder her, Barbara Gainsworth shivered. After traveling all day, they were high in the Virginia mountains, now, rushing onward through the cold, snowy night, sometimes with a loud wail of the engine whistle as they passed through a dimly lighted hamlet, sometimes thundering over a trestle or a culvert; but always climbing, climbing until, caught in the solemnity of the forests, they seemed to be encircling the very mountain peaks themselves. Then they began to descend again, began to leave the great forests behind them.

The Pullman conductor came into the car, swayed up the aisle toward Barbara.

"You get off at Stuart, miss?" he inquired, stopping at her seat and reaching for her ticket.

"Yes," nodded Barbara.

She felt tired and depressed, now. All day she had been traveling, having left New York early that morning, and now it was after eight o'clock. Yet she rather dreaded the end of her journey, began to feel a little panic-stricken. Suppose no one was at the station to

meet her! Suppose her father's telegram had not been received! Then her natural common sense reasserted itself and she commenced to collect her belongings.

"How long before we reach Stuart, porter?" she asked that good-natured individual when he approached her. He rolled his eyes at her as he stooped for her suitcase.

" 'Bout five mo' minutes, miss," he returned. And true enough, five minutes later found a rather excited, rather trembling Barbara descending the Pullman car steps onto the station platform at Stuart.

When the long train had pulled out, she found herself alone, no one else having disembarked. She looked eagerly around; but the place seemed deserted, and with a sinking heart she was about to enter the waiting room when a voice halloed to her from the other end of the platform.

Relief hurried Barbara's footsteps in the direction of the voice, and she was soon facing an alert, fresh-faced young woman who moved forward from where she had been standing by a little sedan car.

"This is Barbara, isn't it?" greeted the young woman cordially. "You see," she went on apologetically, "I wasn't quite sure how to lock the car. We only got it this afternoon, and I didn't like to leave it, so many cars have been stolen lately. You wouldn't think this quiet place could harbor any dishonesty," with an eloquent look around the deserted square in the center of which the railroad station stood. "But it does! Won't you jump in? Is this your suitcase?"

While the young woman was stowing the suitcase away in the rear of the little car, Barbara bent her tall, angular figure to squeeze into a front seat.

"You are——" she began.

"I am Miss Luval," said the young woman briskly, hopping in beside her and placing her foot determinedly upon the car starter.

"But——" Barbara's astonished exclamation was almost lost in the roar of the starter. It would seem, however, as though Miss Luval knew what that exclamation was going to be, for she smiled. She waited until the engine had settled into a steady hum, though, before she turned to laugh frankly into Barbara's face.

"You thought Miss Luval would be an old and pompous person, as the head of Harwood Hall," she accused.

"Oh, no!" Barbara's politeness made her protest.

"Well, she's older than I; but not a bit pompous! I am really Nancy Luval, the real Miss Luval's younger sister. I never can resist teasing the new pupils, though, who always come to Harwood with the picture of a tall, stately, stern Miss Luval firmly fixed in their minds!"

Then Barbara's half-embarrassed, wholly appreciative giggle was lost in the terrific jerk of the car as it sprang forward into the snow in low gear.

"New car—gear shifts—hard!" gasped Miss Nancy, as they shot out of the square into a brightly lighted main street. Barbara, however, caught no more than a mere glimpse of a drug store, of a motion-picture theater, of some stores, before they were

panting up a hill, skidding down another hill, with the new pupil holding onto the car seat, rather wildly wondering, long before they drew up before the great, high-pillared porch of Harwood Hall, just how long Miss Nancy had been driving and whether or not either would ever emerge alive from the new car. She heaved an audible sigh of relief when she found herself stumbling stiffly up the porch steps after Miss Nancy's trim, fur-coated figure.

"I'll send Sambo around after the car," said Miss Nancy rather carelessly. Barbara, who had been taught to take care of her things in thrifty and frugal fashion, once more found herself wondering. But she said nothing.

"We'll go up in the morning room, where we can be cozy and comfy, until study hour is over," continued Miss Nancy.

As Barbara followed her guide across the wide central hall, up the beautiful old stair with its graciously winding mahogany balustrade, she glanced curiously around her. This part of Harwood had originally, she knew, been part of the residence of a famous Confederate officer, whose widow had eventually turned it into a school for girls. The mansion itself had been added to, until now the numerous corridors led off into different wings of dormitories, of classrooms, of a fine gymnasium and swimming pool, of the great study hall and auditorium. But all this Barbara was to discover later. At this moment she was entering the little room which seemed all wicker furniture and bright chintzes, whose wide, deep

windows—so deep that they formed window seats—seemed to invite coziness and confidences.

"And now tell me," began Miss Nancy, when they were facing each other across the softly lighted room, each ensconced in one of the wicker chairs, "how you happen to be coming down here in the middle of the term like this?"

Barbara's thin, self-conscious face flushed; but she answered courteously. "My father and I were abroad during your first term this year—I was ill in London. Then, when we came home, I—I did not get well as fast as Dad thought I ought to, and a friend of his—Mr. Chartres, from New Orleans—happened to dine with us one night and mentioned this school. And so, here I am!"

Miss Nancy laughed at Barbara's fatalistic little shrug, studying her covertly from behind the mask of a friendly smile. She saw a tall, thin girl who had grown too fast for her age, a girl with a thin, clever face which could light up into a shy, charming smile; but which could also droop into a brooding, half-cynical expression sad to see upon such a young countenance.

"Mr. Chartres is a—a dear friend of my sister's," remarked Miss Nancy, clasping her knees with her white hands, speaking confidentially. "He has sent us his young ward, Renée D'Auberville, this year. Really," laughed Miss Nancy, "drumming us up a lot of trade!"

Barbara laughed, too, deciding that she liked the other very much. She did not seem like a teacher,

"Tell me how you happen to be coming down here in the middle of the term."

although she told the new pupil she taught art and craftsmanship, for she was simple and jolly like a girl in her attempts to make Barbara feel at home.

But now the sound of a gong was heard, and immediately after that came the rushing of feet through the corridors. Barbara gazed in alarm at Miss Nancy, who shook her head laughingly.

"It's not a fire," she reassured her. "It's only the girls dismissed from study hour and hurrying down here to see the 'new girl'—you!"

And soon the little room was filled with girls of all descriptions, tall girls, short girls, thin ones, fat ones—all bursting in through the door excitedly, all laughing and talking at once.

Miss Nancy introduced the first few; but after that, surrounded by the laughing, chattering young creatures, she shook her head helplessly.

"I give up!" she exclaimed in mock despair. "You will have to be introduced later. Shoo! Shoo!" She waved her hands at them laughingly. But it was plain to be seen that she was thoroughly enjoying herself and that she was immensely popular with them all. Barbara, after trying in vain to answer the steady stream of questions and comments directed at her, turned shy and relapsed into dignified silence, with which bashful people sometimes try to hide their embarrassment. She was conscious, though, of the ceaseless procession of girls in the corridor outside the open door, girls who, every time they passed, gazed in at her, frankly curious. Never before had Barbara felt so uncomfortably conspicuous, and she

was beginning to be really miserable when all at once a new presence was felt in the little morning room, and every girl sprang to her feet.

Amid respectful silence, the sweet-faced lady who had entered advanced with outstretched hand to Barbara.

"Dear Barbara," she said—and the girl had a queer impression, when the lady kissed her, of standing in the midst of a sunshiny garden full of fragrant, old-fashioned flowers, of bees humming, and the swift, happy flight of birds, of love and warmth and gladness!—"Dear Barbara, welcome to Harwood Hall!"

It was quiet, now. Almost magically, the room and the corridor had cleared, and Miss Luval was left alone with her sister and the new pupil.

"You met her all right, Nancy?" she said inquiringly. Then turning to Barbara with a smile, she went on, "You know my sister has a bad habit of always being late. I have never been able to cure her of it, and now all I can do is to hold her up to the girls as a dreadful example!"

"Now, Alicia, that's too bad, to give me such a reputation!" exclaimed Miss Nancy.

"Oh, she met me all right," said Barbara briefly.

Miss Alicia's eyebrows raised; but she turned to her sister with her usual gentleness. "You told Carlisle and Renée that Barbara was to room temporarily with them?" she asked.

Miss Nancy's face went blank. "Oh, I didn't! I forgot all about it, Alicia! I'm awfully sorry. But we'll go and tell them now!" She jumped to her feet

and Barbara unfolded her length obediently. They stopped at the sound of Miss Luval's voice.

"The car, Nancy dear? Did you take it around to the garage?"

"Jumping Jupiter!" Miss Nancy's lips pursed in comical dismay. "I forgot that, too. Oh, dear!" she groaned. "When will I remember things! I hope the car is still there!" She plunged out into the hall, and Barbara, perforce, had to linger with Miss Luval.

"Well, good-night, my dear," said the principal, as Miss Nancy's cheerful face rounded the stair top once more, and Barbara, oddly enough, again had that impression of warmth and love when Miss Luval pressed her hand. "I hope you will be very, very happy here with us."

And now the girl's face was swept by her pretty, shy smile. "I'm sure I shall be," she said.

Miss Luval stood looking after her as she moved awkwardly away beside Miss Nancy. "A queer mixture of shyness, curtness, and charm," she thought. "I wonder if she *will* be happy here!"

A moment later Barbara was asking herself that very question. She had followed Miss Nancy quite confidently into a low-ceilinged bedroom at the rear of the old mansion, when the look of disagreeable surprise upon one of the girls' faces there brought her to a sudden halt. Miss Nancy, however, appeared to notice nothing amiss.

"Carlisle, Renée," she said brightly, "I don't believe that you have met your new room mate yet. Barbara Gainsworth, from New York or London—which is it,

Barbara? Your home is really in New York, isn't it?" She turned smilingly to Barbara.

Both girls nodded rather formally to the newcomer; but upon turning to Miss Nancy their expression changed so swiftly, they began to chat so merrily, that Barbara thought she must have imagined their lack of cordiality toward herself.

"And now, good-bye, you monkeys! You've got to hurry, for the bell will ring in less than ten minutes. Don't keep Barbara awake by giggling or whispering, for she has been traveling all day!" Miss Nancy spoke with sudden firmness as she turned toward the door; but her eyes were wholly kind as she nodded to them. "The girls will explain our simple rules to you, dear, and I hope you rest well."

The girl called Carlisle, a pretty, fair-haired sixteen-year-old who looked as though she could be jolly if she wanted to be, though she wore an impatient half-frown, now, was just beginning to explain the school rules, a card of which was tacked upon the back of the door, when it burst open, and, headed by a fat girl, about seven more dashed in, to land in a breathless heap in the center of the room.

"She didn't see us!" "Luvva Pete, I thought we were caught that time!" "She turned downstairs!" "Old Constitution, Carlisle—just as we made a dash for it——"

"But aren't you allowed here? The bell hasn't rung yet!"

Barbara's clear voice cut through the hubbub, and the girls' clamor ceased instantly. One glance at her

honestly puzzled face, however, assured them that she was not trying to "kid" them, as Carlisle would have expressed it, and they burst into laughing explanations.

"The room bell rang ten minutes ago. Didn't you hear it? We're all supposed to be in our rooms now, see?" "Luvva Pete, we sneaked across——" "Sneaked, Fatty? That's good! Thundered, you mean, or galloped!"

"Well," said the girl addressed as Fatty, composedly hoisting herself to her feet and walking over to seat herself upon the bed beside Barbara, who could only gasp and stare, "galloped across, if that suits you any better, to see what the new pupil was like!" She made a ceremonious bow laughingly in Barbara's direction. "Miss Luval kept us in ten minutes after study hour. Julie giggled and we all caught it—so we didn't have a good chance to meet her, as you did!" Neither Carlisle nor Renée explained that they had not deigned to rush down to the morning room with the rest. "Tell me," went on Fatty curiously, "why you are starting in school in January?"

For an instant Barbara stared at her haughtily; but no one could withstand Fatty's good-natured smile, and she was about to offer the explanation she had given Miss Nancy as to her entrance into the school at mid-year when the great bell pealed forth overhead.

"Lights out! 'Night, Carlisle and Renée!"

Precipitately, the visitors disappeared across the silent corridor upon tiptoe; but alas, Fatty, comfortably reclining, could not move as quickly as the rest, and before she could struggle to her feet heavy foot-

steps could be heard approaching the now closed door. Carlisle and her room mate had no more time than to exchange appalled glances when the knob turned and a large, majestic, severe-featured lady entered the room and stood still in frozen surprise.

"Carlisle! Renée!" she said at last. "What does this mean! Not in bed after ten o'clock!"

Barbara, who had risen automatically to her feet with the others at the lady's entrance, glanced helplessly at Carlisle. But that young person was quite equal to the emergency.

"Really, Mrs. Lawtry," she began smoothly, "it is not our fault! Miss Nancy brought up the new pupil—have you met her? Barbara Gainsworth, Mrs. Lawtry—and just left a moment ago, after staying to chat a bit." She shrugged her shoulders gracefully.

Mrs. Lawtry's stern features relaxed a little. She nodded stiffly at Carlisle's calm introduction of Barbara.

"Ah, yes, Barbara! But you must hurry now, my dear," she turned ponderously to Carlisle. "I'll give you five minutes more, and then, ab-so-lute-ly, lights must be out!"

She turned and made for the door, while Barbara, a little hysterically, recognized the aptness of the appellation, "Old Constitution." She was, indeed, like nothing more than an old battleship passing out under full sail.

As the door closed behind her, the stiff grins of self-consciousness faded from Carlisle's and Renée's faces. In a businesslike manner, they commenced to

strip their wearing apparel silently from them. Barbara, rather frightened and rather curious, was about to follow their example when a deep groan behind her sent her leaping halfway across the floor. The other girls looked up in amazement.

"Did you——" began Carlisle, when another groan interrupted her, and as it obviously did not come from Barbara over by the door, but from the direction of Barbara's bed, her glance settled horrifiedly upon that innocent-looking article of furniture.

"Whoever put this trunk under here?" said Barbara's bed irritably. "Nice place to put it, I'm tellin' the world, when there's a perfectly goo-ood—trunk room—ouch!—on the third floor!"

"It's—it's——" commenced Carlisle, stammering.

"Yes," snapped Barbara's bed, "it's me! An' how I'm goin' to get out is more'n I know! Ouch! Luvva Pete—I'm stu—uck!"

"It's *Fatty!*" burst out Renée, with a stifled shriek of laughter.

"I told you it was me!" said Fatty's voice crossly. "How'm I goin' to get outa here! If I ever do," the voice paused wrathfully, "I swear I'll never touch another caramel as long as I live! I always knew it was homely to be fat! But—ouch!—I didn't know it was actually *dangerous!*"

Renée ran across the room to peer beneath the bed, with laughter crinkling her pretty, dark face. But when she beheld Fatty's woebegone countenance, with a big smudge making her broad nose ever broader,

she rolled over and lay gasping upon her back from sheer enjoyment.

"I don't see anything so funny about this!" mumbled Fatty indignantly, wrenching this way and that. "If you hadn't put your old steamer trunk under here, I'd 'a' been all right! As it is, I think I'll prob'ly lose a perfectly good left leg—it's all paralyzed and queer feeling now! And my elbow—ouch! Good heavens, I only came under here for a *minute*—until Old Constitution had gone. I certainly," Fatty's voice grew dolorous, "I certainly didn't expect to spend the rest of the school term. Well," her voice grew impatient, "what are you people going to do about getting me out? That's all I want to know!"

"Listen!" said Carlisle suddenly. *"There she is, again!"*

Renée scrambled wildly to her feet. "The five minutes must be up!" she whispered in a panicky voice. "What'll we do, Carlisle?"

"Put the light out!" said that young woman promptly, suiting action to words. "And get into bed and cover up. Keep still, Fatty! Hurry up, Barbara!"

It took only an instant for Carlisle and her room mate to hop into bed, fully dressed though they were, and draw the bedclothes up smoothly to their chins. But poor Barbara was less used to these emergencies. She had barely retreated to the side of her bed, beneath which Fatty lay groaning to herself, when the door opened. And Mrs. Lawtry once more sailed in!

CHAPTER VI

AN ENEMY AND A FRIEND

"BUT, Carlisle, I don't think she was so entirely to blame as you all seem to think!"

"Of course she was to blame, Renée D'Auberville! She's the most stupid, the most unattractive, the most awful girl I've ever met!"

Barbara, her hand upon the doorknob of her room, paused. Quite audibly, Renée's half-hearted protest and Carlisle's shrill answer came to her. She hesitated miserably, although she needed the French book she had forgotten and the class bell would sound in a moment or so. For three days, now, ever since that first unfortunate evening, she had been under the ban of her room mates' displeasure—although, to do her justice, Renée's hot temper had soon cooled and she would have relented ere this had not Carlisle kept up a running fire of bitter remarks and sullen glances.

"But she couldn't help it when Old Constitution had to sail over and turn on the light to satisfy her suspicious mind that we were really all in bed!" said Renée. "And she couldn't help it when Fatty had to go and let out an especially loud groan just then, either!"

"But she *could* help bein' so slow about ducking into

bed!" retorted Carlisle angrily. "And what about her answering Mrs. Lawtry! Why, any fool would have known enough to have kept quiet!"

"Well, that," said Renée judiciously, "was rather stupid!"

"Stupid!" raged Carlisle. "It was contemptible! 'What's that?' " The girl's voice mimicked Mrs. Lawtry's deep tones. " 'It's one of the girls—beneath my bed!' " Here Carlisle's voice froze into Barbara's curt, brief tone. "Honestly, I shouldn't think Fatty would ever have forgiven her! Yellow tattle-tale!"

"Fatty did forgive her—Barbara went to her and apologized—said she was so upset and nervous she blurted it out without thinkin'—she felt badly about it, Barbara did!" Here Renée yawned. "Let's fo'git it, Ca'lisle, old girl! It was jes' ouah ha'd luck you' shoe happened to be stickin' out from beneath the covahs for Mrs. Lawtry to pounce upon! I'll nevah"—here Renée stopped to giggle—"fo'git as long as I live how Fatty looked when Old Constitution had pried her out from between the steamah trunk and the wall! The smudges on Fatty's face and the way she rolled her eyes, as tho' she were somebody's pet poodle, due fo' a beatin'!"

But Carlisle's ire could not be diverted. And to make matters worse, before Barbara could move, she crossed the room at this instant and threw open the door.

"So"—disdainfully she stepped past the scarlet-

faced new pupil—"eavesdropping is added to the rest of your—attractions, I see!"

"Oh, Ca'lisle!" Renée's face was almost as crimson as Barbara's, from sudden sympathy.

Carlisle, however, swept away unheeding.

"Come in, Barbara," added Renée in quick kindness. "Did you-all fo'git somethin'?"

"My French book," mumbled Barbara, going over rather blindly to the table where it lay. She stood for a moment with her back to the other girl, and in the little silence that followed Renée could see her thin shoulders move convulsively. Renée sped to her side.

"You-all mustn't mind Ca'lisle," she said, jerking at Barbara's arm. "She is really a fine girl—when she's not mad at anything!"

Barbara winked back the big tears that would persist in rolling down her cheeks. "I—don't mind her," she answered gruffly. "That is—not much. It's just—oh, I'd like to see my Dad!"

Renée looked up at her compassionately. "You're homesick," she diagnozed. "We all were—after the excitement and the newness wore off. Even I, though I haven't a soul except Mr. Chartres to be homesick for! And Aunt Pinky, of co'se! Anyway, we were all homesick at once, which is less lonely, and soon we had selected our special friends and had paired off. Isn't there," she hesitated, for she was rather afraid, than otherwise, of this tall, dignified, curt-speaking girl, "isn't there anyone you'd like for your friend? For your *special* friend, I mean? Perhaps I could

speak to her—tell her you liked her, you know, or something, so she'd be nice to you."

Quite unexpectedly, Barbara dried her eyes and laughed down into the smaller girl's earnest face.

"You're a peach," she said gratefully, however. "There is one girl, but I'm afraid it wouldn't do much good for you to speak to her about me."

"You never can tell! It might!" urged Renée. "Who is it?"

"Carlisle!" said Barbara grimly.

"Ca'lisle!" Renée's mouth remained open in surprise. "Oh, she would nevah—I mean, she doesn't like—oh, that's too bad!"

"Isn't it the irony of fate that I'd like the one person in school who didn't like me!" responded Barbara. But now that she had discussed her troubles, she felt better. She looked down at Renée with real liking. "Don't you worry about me," she said, "I'll grub along somehow."

"You see," explained Renée confidentially, as they moved out of the room in obedience to the class bell summoning them, then, "Ca'lisle's been an honah girl evah since she came—passed above ninety in all her studies and nevah had a demerit. So that, instead of having to walk out two by two, as the rest of us do, she's had the privilege of taking her daily walk alone, with anothah honah girl. That's Miss Luval's method of reward. But now, with Mrs. Lawtry's giving us all three demerits, poor Ca'lisle's back in the ranks, which is what peeves her and makes her blame you."

"I see," answered Barbara slowly. "And I, in turn,

can hardly blame her for not liking me, though truly," she gave a rueful laugh, "I didn't mean to make trouble that night."

"Of co'se you didn't!" returned Renée promptly. "Well, good-bye for now—Ah'll see you latah!" And nodding, she turned in at her classroom, while Barbara, hurrying down the corridor toward the French room, pondered the problem of getting her room mates out of the scrape she unwittingly had gotten them into.

Carlisle, herself, stood irresolutely before the gym door, then turned away and went upstairs instead.

"I'll just take a cut," she said to herself. "Not that it makes much difference now whether I do or not!"

She climbed to the visitors' gallery that ran around the gym and went over to the window seat at one end. There would be no one there just now, and she wanted to be by herself for awhile.

Downstairs, girls in gym suits were coming out of the locker room for a basketball practice.

"We bid for Carlisle on our side." It was Julie's high-pitched voice.

"You can't have her. She promised us yesterday morning." Helen was positive in her assertion.

"She hasn't come, anyhow, so I suppose we can get along without her for once." Kitty's voice had a sarcastic edge. "You'd think this school couldn't do anything at all without Carlisle. Margaret says they got along well enough without her last year!"

"But it's so much more fun when Carlisle is here," said Julie.

The words were like balm on Carlisle's irritation. They did like her! She had shown Kitty that she could get along without her friendship. She had promised herself that, angrily, when school had opened and Kitty and Margaret had obviously snubbed her.

She had shown them all—her family, too, for she had been the school's honor student at the end of the first semester. If she could keep her place until June, she would win a partial scholarship for next year, and it would not mean such a sacrifice for her mother to send her back.

The scholarship—her irritation returned. There were those demerits! The scholarship student was supposed to have a clear record. If only that awful Barbara hadn't come! A whole term's work for nothing! She couldn't tell Renée about it. A few hundred dollars wouldn't mean anything to her—or to Barbara or to any of the others.

"Well, I won't give up," she said to herself as the bell rang for the end of the period. "I'll be so good they'll just have to give it to me!"

All that day Barbara was preoccupied; but evening found her with her course of action fully decided upon. She would go to Mrs. Lawtry, tell her the circumstances, and ask her to give her, Barbara, *all* of the demerits that lady had bestowed upon the others! Dusk, therefore, discovered her tapping rather breathlessly at Mrs. Lawtry's door. She entered abruptly,

before her courage should give out, at the teacher's brusque invitation.

Mrs. Lawtry's room was a small, low-ceilinged one which, though next to the morning room, that chintz-hung place of Barbara's first Harwood Hall moments, had none of its airiness or charm. This the girl soon discovered was due to the fact that the windows were hung with some dark, heavy stuff which, excluding light and air, had much the same effect upon the room, Barbara thought, that Mrs. Lawtry had upon those with whom she came into contact—a disagreeable, depressing effect. And to be sure, the expression upon the teacher's face, as she looked up from her sewing, was far from encouraging.

"What is it?" she asked impatiently. "This is the recreation hour, you know."

"Yes, I know," answered Barbara hurriedly. "I'm awfully sorry to bother you; but I've—I've been wondering if you would give me those demerits instead of Renée and Fat—I mean Susan and—and Carlisle."

"Demerits? Carlisle?" Still impatiently, Mrs. Lawtry repeated it.

"Yes. Don't you remember? The other night, when I had just arrived."

"Oh—that!" Mrs. Lawtry looked at Barbara sharply. "But it wasn't your fault," she said coldly. "You were not to blame, because they disobeyed rules which they knew quite well."

"But I really was! If I hadn't been there, they would not have broken the rules by staying up to talk to me!" explained Barbara eagerly.

"Come, come, that's rather far-fetched and absurd," and Mrs. Lawtry bit off a thread with a click of her teeth. "You are wasting your time and mine. Good-night!"

And with a little wry grimace, Barbara realized, as soon as she had backed out and closed the door, that she had not helped matters at all.

But the next morning, how different was the greeting which met her as she stepped across the threshold of Miss Luval's door at the hour set apart by the principal for her "heart chats," as she called them, with her girls. And how different was the understanding silence that met her recital of her perplexities. When Barbara had told Miss Luval all, even of her approaching Mrs. Lawtry and the latter's curt denial of her request to allow her to shoulder the blame, the new pupil drew long breath and looked around the big, sunny office. Here were peace and wisdom, one felt, and, in the broad-silled windows, beauty in the shape of blooming potted plants. Unconsciously, the peace of the room became reflected in the girl's face, so that, even before Miss Luval began to speak, Barbara felt better.

Oddly enough, however, Miss Luval did not answer directly Barbara's plea for help. Instead, she smiled across her desk into the girl's dark, thin, eager face.

"Did you ever hear the story of Fair Janet?" she asked. Then, at Barbara's head shake, she went on in her low, musical voice: "I cannot tell you it in detail; but here is the outline, and I will let you read the story later. This shall be your story—every girl

who comes to me goes away with a story—a sort of staff to help her along the Love Path."

"The Love Path—what a pretty name!" exclaimed Barbara. "It's the way we live every day, isn't it—the memory we leave with others?"

"Exactly." And Barbara felt a thrill of pride at Miss Luval's approving nod at her quick perception. "Well, here, in brief, is the tale:

"Fair Janet was the daughter of the Earl of March, and she was so beautiful that many knights and noblemen had asked to marry her; but she would say yea to none of them.

"One day, as she sat sewing a seam, she heard the sound of a horn, sweet and clear, down in the forest. It seemed to call to her, 'Janet, Fair Janet, come hither!'

"She answered the summons. And deep in the heart of the wood, she found a knight all dressed in green, with a silver horn at his lips.

" 'Please, good sir,' she asked timidly, 'is that a fairy horn ye blow and are ye a fairy knight?'

" 'Aye,' answered the Knight in Green, 'and you be the first to hear it, Fair Janet, though I have blown it in many forests. Yet am I mortal, like yourself, being the son of the Earl of Murray, and once my name was John, though now the Little People, who stole me when I was a wee child, call me Tamlane. Only a lady, brave and true, can set me free. You, Fair Janet! And this be how ye are to do so. This night be All Hallowe'en, when the Little People ride abroad at midnight, and ye must wait at Milecross

for them to pass. I shall ride by on a white horse, and my left hand shall be bare o' glove. Seize ye, then, that hand, and pull me from my horse. Be brave and true and hold fast to that which ye have, for it is Happiness.'

"So Fair Janet kissed Tamlane and promised to do as he bade her. And so it came to pass. But when she had seized him, after the fairy queen had ridden past, the fairies called, 'Tamlane's awa'! Tamlane's awa'!' And the queen hurried back. Then was Janet sore afraid, for the queen changed the knight in her arms to a great, gray wolf that struggled and snapped at her. Then it was not a wolf she held; but a bale o' burning straw. Then it was a big serpent which sought to wrap her around and crush her, and at last it was a swan that beat its wings in her face and hissed at her. But she shut her eyes and held it, brave and true. And when the wings were still, she opened her eyes and saw that it was her own true love, son of the Earl of Murray. Thus were the Little People vanquished through her love and courage."

For a few moments there was no sound in the big room after Miss Luval's soft voice had ceased, for Barbara sat dreaming. Then the girl roused herself.

"Be brave and true and hold fast to that which ye have, for it is Happiness," she repeated shyly. "What a lovely thought, Miss Luval."

"It is yours, together with this little blue and gold book, dear," returned Miss Luval, smiling at her. And somehow or other, Barbara found herself dis-

missed, with the little blue and gold book hugged to her breast.

The next few days passed in wintry storm, so bitter that the daily walk was omitted and exercise in the big gymnasium substituted. But it was not the same. The girls grew restless, little cliques were apt to form, gossip apt to be circulated, especially just before the gymnasium class for which the teacher was often late. It was here, one afternoon, that Barbara, drifting around the room, brought up beside a group of girls beside Fatty, to whom they were listening open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

"I tell you," Fatty was saying impressively, "Lily-Belle swears to it! She actually saw the White Lady last night, she says! Honestly, it'd make your blood run cold to hear that colored girl! This is the way she told me. 'Ah was jes' comin' along the corridor in the Old House, neah the mawnin' room, when all of a sudden Ah seen her, Miss Susan! She riz right outa dat flo'! Ah suah did let out a screech, so 'at Miss Nancy come a-runnin' an' a-peerin' at me froo the dusk. She laft at me, Miss Nancy did. 'Nonsense, Lily-Belle,' she sayed to me, 'doan' you-all know dat White Lady ain't been seen since de wah! Dere ain't no mo' ghostes aroun' heah, now!' But Ah seen huh, Ah tell you, jes' lak mah grandmothah seen huh, dat lubly bride dat died o' grief in de Old House when de Yanks got her husban'! Ah tell you, Ah done seen dat White Lady a-walkin'!'" And in imitation of the colored waitress's horrified tones, Fatty's voice sunk to such depths that an appalled

silence settled over her hearers. Only in the background did Barbara's sensible lips begin to curl.

"Lawsy!" Renée's pale cheeks turned a little pastier. "Ah heard Lily-Belle screech, too," she confessed. "If Ah'd known, then, that was what she was a-hollerin' about! Ah wish," she gave a little shiver, "you-all hadn't told us, Fatty!" She glanced up at Barbara. "Did you heah her screech?" she asked, making a kind little attempt to draw the newcomer into the conversation.

But, unfortunately, all of Barbara's common sense rebelled at the tale of Negro superstition she had just heard. Her tone, when she answered Renée, was wholly unappreciative and very cold.

"It's too bad I missed the excitement," said Barbara stiffly. "I was asleep on the couch in the morning room!"

"But that's right where Lily-Belle said she saw the White Lady!" exclaimed Fatty, staring round-eyed and puffing out her cheeks in anxious anticipation of the other's being able to add information concerning the mystery. Barbara, however, shook her head.

"I was asleep and heard nothing," she repeated drably, moving away.

There was a huffed pause, then Renée, ever thoughtful, broke it by jumping to her feet. "The last one on the ladders is a bob-tailed, pie-eyed monkey," she shrieked childishly. And, as though by magic, that end of the gymnasium was cleared of lounging girls.

Left to herself upon one of the ropes, Barbara started to climb idly. She had sensed her tactlessness,

knew at once that the girls thought her uninteresting and unfriendly. There had been her chance! Why could she not have created some exciting details to add to Lily-Belle's foolish tale, secured interest in herself? But no, she had to be honest—and stupid! And so miss the opportunity to become acquainted with the other girls!

Suddenly, a gasp far above Barbara caused her to look up. There, seated, chalky-faced, swaying upon the beam to which the ropes were attached although they had been forbidden to climb that high, was a slender, golden-haired girl. And as Barbara stared a shudder swept over the other.

"I feel so—so queer," stammered the girl. "I—I——"

Her voice strangled itself into silence. Barbara knew instinctively that the girl was about to faint. A thrill of terror engulfed her as she glanced down at the cement floor, thirty or more feet below the beam. It was just at this moment that the teacher, stepping into the Gym, happened to look up.

"Julie!" The color drained out of Miss Atkinson's face. "What's the matter?"

The other girls now looked up. Someone uttered a stifled cry. Julie, far above Barbara, opened her eyes.

"My head!" she muttered stupidly. "Can't see—dizzy—it's my head——"

Again came that stifled cry as she swayed forward, then backward. Even the teacher's lips trembled as she sought self-control. She started to run toward a

pile of mats, with a vague idea of dragging them beneath Julie, and the other girls—some of them—caught at this idea and ran forward, too. But above them, a tall, slender figure, had already started to the rescue.

Poor Barbara, her strength not wholly regained after her illness in the fall—the climb up that far on the rope had almost exhausted her. Now every inch of that upward straining seemed to tear at her muscles unbearably. She told herself despairingly she could *not* climb another foot—and saw that she must climb three! Must climb two! At last she almost grasped the edge of the girder and in her terrific eagerness missed it and slipped back down the rope. Julie, her eyes closed, almost unconscious, now, slumped forward perilously. Below, with the little mats piled in futile fashion before her, Miss Atkinson wrung her hands. Someone started to sob while Barbara, the perspiration of agonized effort streaming into her eyes, made a last tremendous effort. Vaguely, she wondered within herself why she was making such an effort. Nothing was worth it, that tearing at her raw muscles, that horrible choking of her breath and pounding of her heart. Little green and purple lights danced before her eyes. Could she do it? Could she reach that little figure before it should slip off from its place of danger and go hurtling down through the air?

Then, all at once, these words flashed into Barbara's numb mind. She muttered them aloud, with great panting breaths between each word.

"Be brave — and — true — and—*hold*—*fast*—to—

that—which—ye have, for—it is—Happiness! Do you—hear—me, Julie?" She emphasized the words: "*Hold fast* to that which ye have!"

Julie opened her eyes. The light came back into them. She raised her head and just as Barbara reached her, grasped her firmly, across the space between the ropes, she spoke.

"I hear—you!" she said. "I *will* hold fast and—I *like* you!"

When they had got down, somehow, Barbara watching the other girl carefully, and when Julie had been thoroughly scolded by Miss Atkinson, Miss Luval entered the gymnasium and came up to the excited, agitated girls.

"Well, I'm glad to see you all so merry," she smiled. Someone laughed rather hysterically; but without notice the principal turned to Barbara. "My dear," she said hurriedly, "I came to tell you that you are to room with Julie, whose former room mate has been called home unexpectedly." She caught the smile that flashed between the two girls. "That's settled, then. Happiness *can* mean friends, eh, Barbara?"

Tall, thin, dark-eyed Barbara felt shy fingers slip into the hand that still burned and stung from her rope-climbing. She glanced down at Julie and suddenly smiled her rare smile that Miss Luval had come to love. But, "Yes," was all she answered, in her curt, dry voice.

CHAPTER VII

TANTRUMS

TWO by two, a long, uniformed line of girls swept through the Harwood Hall gate and marched down the hilly street. Two by two the uniformed cadets of Stuart Military Academy marched up the hilly street. And Miss Luval, at the head of her line, smiled and bowed to Colonel Marston, at the head of his, a greeting which was cordially reciprocated. There was a little wavering pause as the two lines met at their mutual destination, an ivy-covered, old stone church, and then separated, the cadets marching in through the front door and the Harwood Hall girls going around to a side door. They met again inside, as girls and boys filed into their reserved pews upon each side of the broad center aisle, well down toward the front of the church nave, while the rest of the congregation rustled and whispered their way into the pews behind them.

Then came a long peal of the organ, and the vested boys' choir swaying in, and last of all Mr. Dunham, the rector, stalking to his high-backed chair, and the usual Sunday services of the Fellowes' Memorial Church had begun.

Carlisle, kicking off a pump that hurt her foot,

glanced down idly at her black uniformed lap. Only on Sundays did the girls have to wear uniforms; but they really looked very nice in the trim, serge suits and white gloves and soft, gray felt hats. Each girl secretly felt herself to be trim, slim, and smart-looking in one yet complained aloud bitterly because she had to wear it.

"The Fanny Mayhew girls don't wear uniforms any more, even to church!" (That was the Fanny Mayhew Seminary over at the other end of town.)

"Well, who wants to be a Fanny Mayhew!" (Enormous contempt in one's voice!)

So it went on, the complaining and the secret satisfaction in having to wear the chic uniforms, and many a girl, gazing up at Mr. Dunham apparently in rapt attention, was really only conscious of her own young self, of her bobbed hair peeping from beneath the edge of the gray hat, of her slender white-gloved hands, of her pretty gray-silk ankles. But this Sunday Carlisle, pensively rubbing a stockinged foot against her other foot in its patent-leather pump, sent a sidelong glance at the row of gray-clad cadets across from her aisle seat. Nice-looking boys, she thought idly—especially the third one from the end!

Then her interest leaped, centered. For there was Kitty Evans deliberately turning around in the pew ahead of Carlisle's and definitely smiling at one of the cadets. Carlisle craned her neck. Which one? Oh, the nice one who was third, across the aisle, and he was smiling back. He was awfully red, though—perhaps he didn't like to have Kitty smile at him. Or per-

haps it was only the reflection from the stained glass window above his head. But how horrid of Kitty—so bold and—and—sort of horrid!

The time for the collection came. It was the cadets' turn to take it up, as they did every other Sunday, passing straight-shouldered and manly along the aisles, poking little trays fastened onto long handles across the pews. Carlisle, gazing straight ahead of her, could not fail to see a white flash of paper passing from Kitty's hand into the tray nor to note that the Third Cadet, who was serving upon their side, surreptitiously fished it out before offering the tray to her. The next instant Carlisle's heart gave a thump, for the Third Cadet, leaning over her to reach Renée and the other girls beyond her, stumbled over something, gave it a kick . . . It was her slipper!

A titter, like a wave, ran through the Harwood Hall girls, through the rows of cadets upon the other side of the church. Carlisle, her face crimson, pretended to study the church calendar. Smiling, suspicious glances were flashed at her. She bent her head, attempted a yawn. Far be it from her to acknowledge ownership to that slipper lying so conspicuously out in the middle of the aisle! A stifled giggle came from Renée who had happened to glance down and discover Carlisle's stockinged foot. Carlisle frowned. Miss Nancy, at the other end of the row, leaned forward inquiringly and shook her head.

Carlisle stole an agonized glance at the slipper. Yes, it really was beyond her reach, up near the pew ahead of hers, Kitty Evans's pew. What a horrid cadet,

thought Carlisle violently! He must have known that it was her pump that he had stepped upon, must have known that he had kicked it!

There came the tramp of young feet up the aisle toward the chancel railing, where Mr. Dunham was waiting quietly to bless the collection. A little vague pause of one pair of cadet feet and the slipper hurtled a foot or so—but in the wrong direction! Now it was hopelessly beyond its owner's reach! Carlisle's heart sank. At least, though, the Third Cadet had tried to restore it to her.

She heard very little of the blessing which followed —it was just a mumble of words to her—or of the beautiful solo in which the boy soprano's voice went fluttering up and up until it seemed as though it must be fluttering against the very gates of heaven itself. It made Renée, who loved music, feel all queer and trembly inside. But to Carlisle, miserably speculating the best way to retrieve her pump, it was "just a song," pretty enough except that it was rather tiresomely long. Then the congregation had to stand up to sing, and Renée beside her and Fatty beyond, who had become cognizant of the situation by that time, giggled a little to themselves as Carlisle grimly balanced herself upon one foot and stared, in a fierce attempt to snub them, straight ahead at the long, thin neck of the tall girl in front of her.

The sermon followed. Carlisle, pondering, thought bitterly that if it had only been a rainy Sunday, she might have had an umbrella with which to reach the

pump. But it had been a bright, cold morning, with not one cloud in the sky. So that was that!

The worst of it was that she felt so conspicuous, sitting away up in front. Why on earth did the Harwood Hall pupils *have* to sit up there anyway, as though they were naughty children and had to be watched every minute! And now she felt as if every pair of eyes belonging to the congregation behind her were focused upon *her*! If only, when the Harwood Hall girls left the church, they would be allowed to file out by the center aisle. But this, Carlisle knew, would not be done. They would face the side aisle instead and make their exit through the side door, as they had entered. Otherwise, she might have stooped down quietly and have secured her slipper.

It seemed, now, as though Miss Luval, through some secret medium, up in the front row, had become aware of Carlisle's disturbed thoughts, of the girls' grins and the answering grins of the boys across the aisle. She half turned in her seat, Carlisle caught a glimpse of a lifted eyebrow as Miss Luval's profile was revealed to her, and Miss Nancy leaned forward alertly, questioningly. Oh, goodness, would this mean another demerit, thought the girl despairingly!

Then, quite simply, the girl in the aisle seat of the pew ahead of Carlisle's reached out a long arm, picked up the slipper and without turning her head, handed it back to its owner by way of the aisle. Carlisle took it thankfully out of the motioning hand. But the next instant she had made a little unconscious face of dislike, for the other girl was Barbara Gainsworth.

Renée, watching out of the corner of her eye, smiled, then frowned. How unfair Carlisle was, thought Renée!

Glancing back over her shoulder, as they all stood up for Mr. Dunham's benediction and then turned toward the side aisle, Renée wondered if Carlisle would speak to Barbara, would thank her. Carlisle, however, it seemed had no intention of doing so. She faced left determinedly, followed close behind Renée. True, Barbara kept her shoulder turned, her young face showed stony and cold as they marched out.

Outside, taking a deep breath, Carlisle snapped to Renée as she moved forward to fall into step beside her, "Wouldn't you have thought that poor idiot would have reached for my slipper long before she did and handed it back to me! Some people have no sense at all!"

Too taken aback to speak, Renée turned and looked at her companion in genuine astonishment. Then, opening her mouth, she closed it tightly again, for fear of what she might say. But this did not suit Carlisle at all.

'Wouldn't you?" she repeated angrily.

Renée shook her head. "No, I wouldn't," she answered then, with some of Fatty's own bluntness. "That slipper was hardly any nearer to Barbara than it was to you. Why should she risk a demerit by leaning out to get it and having Miss Luval think it was her slipper? I think it was mighty nice of her to hand it to you."

"Well, I don't! I don't thank her at all!" replied

Carlisle sullenly. "She made it very evident that she didn't want to help me, by waiting so long!" She glanced along the moving line of girls, now slowly climbing the hill toward Harwood Hall, to where Barbara's tall, gaunt figure could be seen stalking along behind Miss Luval. As Carlisle looked, Miss Luval turned, with her sweet smile, to speak to Barbara, and the new pupil bent forward eagerly to answer her. A hot wave—was it jealousy?—shot through the watching Carlisle. Despicable, the way a newcomer could come down and worm her way ahead of the older pupils, for Carlisle counted herself that, now!

Fatty spoke, that instant, behind her. "Oh, be fair, Carlisle!" she exclaimed impatiently. "It always gives me a pain to have anyone refuse to give credit where credit is due!"

Carlisle spoke stiffly, without turning her head. "When I come across a situation where credit is *really* due, I'll give it," she retorted. And relapsed into an offended silence that lasted all the way back to the school.

After church the pupils of Harwood Hall were allowed an hour and a half, until midday dinner, to do as they pleased. This interval was generally spent in Fatty's room, as now, for it was large, light, and sunny, and was in the front of the building, so that a fine view of the street—and of passers by—could be obtained. It was there that Lily-Belle's discreet tap was heard.

"Miss Luval done want Miss Ca'lisle," explained the little colored maid when Fatty opened the door.

Carlisle, inside the room, recovered from her recent ill-humor, groaned loudly.

"Here's another demerit! I'll eat my hat if it isn't!" And very reluctantly she followed Lily-Belle downstairs to Miss Luval's office. Renée and Fatty and Helen Benedict, crowding to the door to gaze after her commiseratingly, agreed upon Carlisle's "hard luck." For, as Fatty observed, it was just plain, dumb luck that let that poor boob of a cadet kick her slipper as he had.

"Honestly, it does seem as though poor Carlisle had had unlucky things happening to her ever since Barbara came, starting out with that first night!" went on Fatty sympathetically. "She wanted to be an honor girl terribly this month—really worked hard for it!"

"Yes, but it wasn't Barbara's fault Carlisle's pump hurt her so she took it off and that boy kicked it," returned Helen sensibly, turning back into the room. The other two followed her, Fatty throwing herself upon the chaise-longue her father had given to her for Christmas, and Renée picking up her ukulele to strum it softly.

"Oh, dear," sighed Fatty in a gloomy voice presently. "I wish it was half-past one and dinner time! Honestly, I'm so starved I don't think I'll last that long. If I die, bury me in grave-y!"

Two deep groans greeted this dreadful wit, and Helen threw a lazy pillow from the bed at the perpetrator.

Meanwhile, Carlisle, tapping at Miss Luval's door and summoned into the principal's office by her soft

voice, felt a disagreeable shock of surprise go through her when she had entered, for there stood Barbara.

Carlisle's round chin went up. "You wished to see me, Miss Luval?" she asked defiantly.

Miss Luval held out a white hand, ignoring, purposely or otherwise, the hardness of the young voice. "Come here, dear, and tell me about this morning in church," she said quietly. "I sent for Barbara, for I had an idea she was the culprit."

Carlisle flashed the other girl a bitter, accusing glance. "And she told you——" she began hotly.

Miss Luval looked up in surprise. "No, Carlisle," she answered, "Barbara has told me nothing. It was Miss Nancy, just now, who reported that you were the Cinderella. That will be all, Barbara, my dear," she nodded to the silent Barbara. "Thank you for coming."

The new pupil smiled her brief, rare smile at Miss Luval and quietly left the room. When the door had been closed gently behind her, the principal turned to Carlisle, who had been waiting in uncomfortable silence, and motioned to a little, low, friendly chair beside her desk.

"I sent for you, dear," she commenced simply, "partly to find out the cause of the slight disturbance in church this morning, partly for another reason. About church? What happened? Miss Nancy was rather vague."

"I pulled off my pump because it hurt my foot," explained Carlisle sullenly, "and one of the cadets, when he passed the collection plate, stumbled against it—I

was in the end seat of the pew—and he kicked it out into the aisle."

Miss Luval waited a moment; but Carlisle had fallen to studying the rug in an aimless fashion and did not continue. Miss Luval suppressed a little smile.

"Well, why didn't you pick it up at once, my dear?" she asked, then.

Carlisle raised her eyes to the lady's serene face. "I was afraid of getting a demerit," she said honestly. "And—and—" her voice trembled a little—"I didn't want another one. I've worked hard to be an honor girl!"

With a quick little gesture of understanding, the principal leaned forward and placed her hands over the nervous, tremulous ones in Carlisle's lap.

"I know you have, dear child," she answered kindly. "But surely your own common sense should have told you that a demerit is never given because of an accident. And how much better it would have been, Carlisle, to have secured the slipper quietly and at once, than to have left it there in the aisle as a source of amusement and disturbance for both the cadets and the Harwood Hall girls, as well as the congregation! Carlisle," she went on soberly, "you are here at Harwood to learn how to cope with just such situations as this one. All your life you will have emergencies arising, some as trivial, some more serious; but each time you will have to decide quickly and competently what you are to do—then do it! And if you have decided to the very best of your knowledge and ability, if you are trying to do what is right and you are perfectly sure in your own

mind that it is the right thing—no one can blame you for any consequences which might arise, for that is all that anyone can do, ever, in this world."

"I see," nodded Carlisle slowly, when the principal's voice had ceased.

"Now," Miss Luval shook her own head slightly as though glad to have finished her little sermon, "I wanted to speak to you about a silly affair which has been disturbing the school." She paused, then continued thoughtfully: "I don't know whether you have heard anything about it or not—it is about a foolish superstition first started among the Negro servants here in school many years ago. Recently, that old superstition has been revived, much to my displeasure."

Carlisle looked at her in surprise. "If there is a superstition about anything here at school, I have never heard about it," she answered quickly. She was relieved. From the principal's opening words, she had been afraid that she was about to be questioned concerning Kitty Evans and the foolish little note she had seen her place in the collection plate that morning. "Not that I would believe the superstition if I heard it," she added.

"That is right," smiled Miss Luval. "The more everyone takes that attitude, Carlisle, the quicker this foolish affair will die down. Now," she made a little gesture of dismissal so that Carlisle at once arose, "let us all work together, dear. There are aways foolish, hysterical people in any crowd, the kind who cry 'Fire!' and start a panic before fire is actually discovered, or the kind who surge around an injured or a fainting per-

son, to exhaust the precious air which that person might desperately need. But, too, there are always level-headed people in every gathering, Carlisle"—here Miss Luval looked up at her meaningly, so that the girl flushed with sudden pleasure—"and that is why every leader tries to continue his work, because he is sure of help from them. That is all, Carlisle dear, and thank you for coming."

Carlisle, opening the door to Fatty's room very softly a few minutes later, discovered her hostess catnapping upon the chaise-longue, Helen busy with a letter, and Renée staring wistfully out of the window. Her entrance was not so quiet, however, but that all three, at the click of the doorknob, did not turn interested eyes toward her.

"What's the verdict?" murmured Fatty sleepily. "Imprisonment for life or hung by the neck until dead?"

"How can you joke that way, Fatty?" shuddered Renée. "Tell us," she demanded, coming forward eagerly, "what Miss Luval said? Did you-all get a demerit, Ca'lisle?"

"No." Carlisle shook her head. "She said it was an accident and that I should have just recovered my slipper at once. But that—that girl was there!" Carlisle's voice thickened. "I'll bet, in spite of what Miss Luval said—that it was Miss Nancy who reported about my slipper—that it was that girl instead!"

"What girl?" inquired Fatty, sitting up interestedly.

"Oh—that Barbara Gainsworth!" burst out Carlisle bitterly. "It looks mighty queer to me that she should

have been standing there in Miss Luval's office when I was sent for! She's a sneak—I've known that for a long time, and Renée knows it—why, that next day after she came I caught her eavesdropping——"

The intense silence in the room suddenly penetrated Carlisle's consciousness. She stopped short and looked at the three embarrassed faces before her.

"What's the use of telling you girls anything any more?" she accused passionately, then. "You—you used to be *my* friends!" She choked. "Now you are all in with that horrid Barbara Gainsworth!" And she turned blindly toward the door.

But Renée sprang after her. "Ah don't, Carlisle!" she cried pitifully. "We *are* your friends, we are!" She caught her room mate by the arm. And looked back at the other girls. "Tell her we are, Fatty, Helen!" she appealed to them.

Fatty got up and strode heavily over to Carlisle. "Of course we are your friends, Carlisle," she said earnestly. "It's only that—well, we're tired of hearing you pan Barbara all the time. You've been doing it steadily every chance you get, ever since she came. Not that I'm stuck on Barbara myself especially," said Fatty in a candid tone. "And I can't for the life of me see what Julie sees in her to make such a fuss over; but—good-night, you act as though you didn't even want her to *live*! It's no use, Carlisle, you can't get such a 'down' on anyone! It's not good sportsmanship, and when you go raving around against that person, you only make other people dislike *you*!"

"Thanks," said Carlisle, white with anger. She

snatched her hand away from Renée, looked at Fatty and Helen. "I'm glad I know where I stand with you!" An instant later the violent slamming of Fatty's door indicated that Carlisle had gone to her own room.

"Golly-gosh!" ejaculated Fatty, staring at the still quivering door. "Who would ever think we'd have a cyclone in February!"

Both Renée and Helen laughed, a little shakily, and the latter returned to her letter-writing. But Renée, after several futile attempts to settle down with a book, at last started out of the room, too.

"Where y'goin'?" asked Fatty from the chaise-longue, to which she had retired once more with an exhausted gesture.

"Fatty, I must see Ca'lisle—she may be cryin', po' thing!" said Renée, stopped at the threshold. With a little shake of her head, she hurried off.

"Always," murmured Fatty to Helen, "I'll bet Carlisle has had someone to run after her, after one of her tantrums, for fear she may be crying over something entirely her own fault!"

"Probably," agreed Helen absently. And a Sunday silence settled down once more in Fatty's room, interrupted only by the scratching of Helen's pen.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JUMP

IT TOOK Carlisle several days to get over her "mad," as Fatty called it. It was not, in fact, until a snowstorm swept upon Stuart, which sent the girls of Harwood Hall piling out in knickers and sweaters and knitted caps and scarfs to the long hill in back of the school buildings with their sleds. There, in the cold, crisp air, after the storm had cleared, with the bright January sun sparkling upon great drifts and snow-burdened fir trees, Carlisle became her own cheerful self again, for half of our tantrums in this life are caused by too close confinement to the house and a lack of fresh air in our lungs.

"Clear the lulla!" she cried, at the top of the hill. "Get on, Renée, if you want a thrill!"

Squealing half with terror, half with pleasure, Renée "got on" and away they went. It seemed not a second before they were at the bottom of the course and the long, hard climb back up the hill was to be done over again. But even that was fun, because it made them feel all tingly and alive and brisk.

"Isn't it gre—great!" puffed Fatty, as she approached the top of the slide behind them.

"Great!" echoed Carlisle heartily, forgetting that she had been snubbing poor Fatty since Sunday. "Look,

Fatty, who is that coming out of the Gym?" Glancing back down the hill over her shoulder, she pointed idly to a girl just emerging from one of the school buildings. "And what on earth is she carrying?" Carlisle stopped, turned around, and shaded her eyes from the snow glare to peer more intently at the far-away figure.

"Don't know," replied Fatty laconically. "Who is it, Renée—can you see?"

Renée's dark little face lighted up after she had gazed an instant. "Why, it's Barbara!" She turned to the others excitedly. "And, goody, she has her skis with her! I've been simply dying to see someone do it—we missed it when we were in Switzerland, Grandfather and I, because it was summer. And of course we never had a chance when we were home in New Orleans. Barbara learned to ski in Switzerland—she can even jump on them!"

Carlisle's slim, girlish figure in gay red sweater and scarf had stiffened. "How do you know? Did she tell you she learned to ski in Switzerland?" she sneered. "Are you going down with me, Renée?" she added shortly. "It's too cold to stand here admiring anyone, even Barbara Gainsworth! Not coming? All right—clear the way! Clear the way!" And at Renée's head shake, Carlisle threw herself headlong upon her sled and shot petulantly away.

"Whew! Barbara certainly does completely and absolutely peeve Carlisle, doesn't she!" remarked Fatty, with a boyish whistle. She drew her long sled around and seated herself upon it, patting the small space left

beside her. "Don't you want a rest? I wish I had some milk chocolate, right now—this air makes you awfully hungry!"

"It's such a shame!" Renée's face drooped as she refused the proffered space. "Why can't Ca'lisle be friendly toward Barbara and all of us have fun together! Barbara's a nice girl and Ca'lisle is, too—that's the pity of it. Aside from that one silly, stubborn streak, Ca'lisle is a peach!"

"Is she?" Fatty's tone was skeptical. "I'm beginning to wonder!"

Renée looked down at her reproachfully. "There, you see!" she exclaimed. "It's just as you yourself said, Fatty! All of Ca'lisle's dislike of Barbara is going to come back like a—what are those things you throw and they shoot around and come back where they start from?"

"Boomerang?" supplied Fatty.

Renée nodded. "That's it! Like a boomerang on Ca'lisle herself. Even you, who used to be so fond of her, are commencing to feel that way about her."

"What way?" asked Fatty, her eyes upon Barbara's and Julie's approaching figures.

"Why, wondering if she is as nice as you thought," explained Renée impatiently. "Now, don't you, Fatty?"

"I don't believe I really do," answered Fatty slowly. "Underneath, I am still just as fond of Carlisle as ever, for I feel sure that some day she'll wake up and see how silly she's been. As for you—you're certainly a good little sport, Renée"—the stout girl looked up af-

fectionately at Renée—"and a loyal friend, and Carlisle's lucky to have drawn you for a room mate. It won't be your fault in any way if things come to a grand crisis between Carlisle and Barbara," she added comfortingly, "so stop your worrying about 'em!"

Head down, flat upon her sled, Carlisle whizzed past tall Barbara, with the shorter Julie trotting along beside her, both engaged in friendly argument as to who should carry Barbara's skis.

"Why—why should you—you do any of the work, when you—you aren't going to have the fu—fun of using them!" panted the latter. "Wait a second—I've got to get my breath!"

Julie looked at her protestingly as they stopped at one side of the slide. "Your sense of fairness almost overbalances you at times, Barbara!" she said impatiently. "Why in the world can't you be sensible and let me carry one of the skis for you? Goodness knows it won't be for a very long distance—you've argued all the way up the hill, almost. Besides, who knows, maybe I *will* have the fun of using them?"

Barbara looked at her eagerly as they started their upward climb once more. "Oh, will you!" she began. "I'd love to show you how, Julie—I know you'd just love it after you once got started skiing! It's glorious sport—the sensation is almost like flying, you feel so free and light as you skim downhill!"

Julie shook her head. "Barbara," she said solemnly, "I wouldn't go down on a pair of those things for—well, not even if the Prince of Wales were standing right here to ask me to do so! And I'd certainly,"

giggled Julie, "love to have the Prince of Wales *ask* me! 'But, no,' I'd say, 'not to-day, your—your Highness—it's not—not steep enough!' "

Barbara looked back down the snow-covered declivity and laughed. "Well, you *do* get a nicer start if it's steeper," she admitted.

Julie threw up her hands in real horror. "It seems like suicide as it is!" she cried. "Come on, woman, before you decide to jump from the top of the Woolworth Building or the Washington Monument and go in to pack your grip!"

The two room mates were greeted by a chorus of laughing remarks when they reached the little group of girls waiting for them at the top of the hill.

"Think this easier than taking gas or a dose of poison?" asked Fatty sarcastically, glancing, as Julie had, down the steep slope up which they had been climbing and then coming over to examine with interest the skis Barbara threw down upon the ground with a grunt of relief. The other girls crowded around, too, eyeing with the same interest the professional-looking straps and buckles by means of which Barbara was adjusting the skis to her slender feet.

Barbara chuckled. "If you girls think it's going to be too exciting for your little selves to watch me, you'd better turn your backs!" she gibed good-naturedly.

Julie groaned. "Honestly, though, all joking aside, Babs, it looks a thousand miles down there to where Carlisle is standing. Don't you think you had better——"

"Better what?" interrupted Barbara, grinning. "Wait until the snow melts?"

"Don't be funny!" said Julie severely. "But, really, I don't think your father'd like to have you take a risk——"

"He saw me take worse ones in Switzerland," retorted Barbara coolly. She stood up, pulled on her gloves. But as the girls waited for her to start, they saw her glance at them uncertainly.

"Say, I don't know," she commenced dubiously.

Julie moved toward her impetuously. "That's just what *I* think, Barbara! Give up the skiing! Try one of these sleds, instead—it's not half as dangerous! Here, Fatty'll lend you her sled—won't you, Fatty?"

"Sure, sure!" Fatty was beginning heavily, when Barbara's clear laugh rang out.

"It wasn't that, Julie, you poor, little goose! You didn't really think I was afraid, did you? And thanks just the same, Fatty! No, it was this—won't these narrow ski tracks cut into your very decent slide if I go down? You see, the snow is too deep and soft to try it anywhere else; but I don't want to spoil the slide when some of you have worked all afternoon packing it down."

"Aw, go ahead, it won't matter!" "Sure, take a chance!" "One or twice or even more won't hurt, Barbara—go ahead!"

These exclamations being hurled at her, Barbara turned her face forward once more, pulled down her cap with a determined gesture, and, clasping her hands

lightly behind her, while assuming a slightly crouched position, she was off!

Straight as an arrow, swift as the flight of a swallow, down, down she shot! Back came her clear call, as some of the ascending coasters scattered before her. Then, with a beautiful sweep and curve, she had crossed the level meadow at the foot of the hill, and, slowing to a stop, she slipped her feet out of the skis and, stooping, picked them up, packed them beneath her arm, and started upon the long trudge back up the hill.

"Golly-gosh!" breathed the watching Fatty, awe in her voice. She rolled her eyes at Renée. "Would you do that?" she inquired solemnly.

"Would I want to drop from a balloon in a parachute?" retorted Renée, jumping up and down to start the circulation in her cold toes. "Don't be an uttah simpleton, Fatty! That is," she added judicially, "any more of a simpleton than old Mothah Nature made you-all!"

"Well, but," said Fatty unmoved, in a speculative tone, "it looks like it *would* be fun, as Barbara said! What do you think, Carlisle?" She turned to the latter as she reached them, dragging her sled behind her.

"Wha—what do I—I think about wha—what!" panted Carlisle. "Mercy, what a hill!"

"What do you think about skiing? Don't you think it would be fun?" repeated Fatty. "Say, girls, that was mighty thoughtful of Barbara, wasn't it—about not wanting to cut up the slide with her ski tracks!"

There was a chorus of affirmations. "It certainly

was nice of Barbara," agreed Renée cordially. "She's an awfully good sport about everything!"

Carlisle's pretty face assumed an expression of weary boredom, and without replying to Fatty's question or inviting anyone to go down the slide with her, she flung herself upon her sled and started off once more.

"There!" ejaculated Renée disconsolately. "I was just gettin' ready to go down with Ca'lisle and off she goes without askin' me! What's the mattah with her, anyway!"

"Don't you know?" asked Fatty pointedly. "Carlisle just can't bear the mention of Barbara's name, as I told you, that's all!"

Julie's face saddened; but she bent and caught up the rope of an abandoned sled someone had accommodatingly left there and turned with determined cheerfulness to Renée.

"C'mon, you poor little timid Southerner," she said amiably. "I'll offer to take you before Fatty does, for goodness knows where you'd find room to ride on *her* sled!"

"See here," began Fatty indignantly, "I'll have you know I've lost three pounds these last two weeks!" But her words were lost in a jeer of laughter from the other two as they sped away. "That's gratitude," mumbled Fatty bitterly to a little day pupil standing near by. "Here I pull up this heavy sled for—well, I thought Renée'd go down with me this time—and off she goes with Julie Austin. It's no fun to slide alone!"

The day pupil cleared her throat bashfully. "I'd

like to go down with you, Miss Smith," she said earnestly.

So, cheered both by the prospect of company and the respectful "Miss Smith," Fatty flopped upon her sled and said, "All right, child, pile on!" And they, too, were off, Fatty grunting loudly at every dip of the slide, and the day pupil letting out a wild screech, now and then, as she bounced and jounced on top of her pillowy companion. But they reached the foot of the hill safely and slowly climbed back again to the top, where they once more found Barbara Gainsworth, surrounded by her class mates, engaged in earnest protest about something.

"What's the argument?" asked Fatty breathlessly, breaking into the group.

"Yes, what's the argument?" echoed the little day pupil boldly, her admiring eyes fixed upon Fatty.

Renée turned toward them impatiently. "Babs, here, doesn't want to use the slide any more—she's afraid she'll cut into it too much," she began. She stopped, stared ironically. "Where'd you pick up your shadow?" she giggled.

"Leave her alone—she went down with me when the rest of you deserted me!" growled Fatty.

Renée edged over to her at once. "Now, Fatty, you-all aren't mad at me, are you?" she began. "Mah goodness," she glanced over her shoulder at the approaching Carlisle, "we've had enough o' *that* for the past few days without you-all gettin' that way, too, Fatty," she finished plaintively.

"You're right, Renée," answered Fatty promptly,

her good-natured face clearing. "Come on, Barbara," she called out, "I'll beat you down. Come on, Renée, you go for added weight—we'll beat her, skis or no skis!"

The two girls threw themselves laughingly upon Fatty's sled, and Barbara, chuckling, was off upon her skis, while the rest followed excitedly. Carlisle, about to start, too, after slamming her sled around, noticed the wistfulness upon the little day pupil's face as she stood disconsolately alone.

"Come on, Mary," said Carlisle kindly, stifling a secret sigh, for it was only by supreme effort that one was ever able to get rid of Mary Fillmore once she was admitted to intimacy, for she was the school bore.

The afternoon wore on. Now the slide, despite Barbara's ski tracks, packed by the downward traffic of the more numerous sleds, began to assume a mirror-like surface, for as the sun began to sink, the temperature dropped, and the slide commenced to freeze over. Faster and faster flew the sleds, swifter and yet more swiftly went Barbara upon her ashe-skis.

"There's only one thing I don't like about this hill," observed Fatty to Renée, after awhile.

"What's that?" asked the other idly. Beneath her scarlet cap, her lips and cheeks were as scarlet, and her sparkling eyes showed how far behind lay the weariness and the loneliness which had been the burden of that little figure stealing out one midnight from the old D'Auberville mansion. "What is that, Fatty?" she repeated, as Fatty did not at once answer.

The other drew a quick breath and pointed down

the hill soberly. "There, that's what I don't like—that big old tree standing right beside the course. Sometime there's going to be a crash there—that stupid kid, Mary Fillmore, just now missed it by barely a half foot! *Hey, clear the lul-la! Clear the way!* It's those girls coming back up the hill who walk right on the slide and don't watch out for the ones coming down who cause all the trouble!" scolded Fatty.

Renée laughed at her. "C'mon, Fatty—stop your worryin'!"

"This is about my last time," said Fatty, placing herself upon her sled. "I have to go in and finish that French exercise!"

"I, too!" agreed Renée.

"Better not say it's your last time," advised Carlisle. "There, thank goodness, I've shifted Mary Fillmore to the tender mercies of that other day pupil—what's her name—Katherine Robb?—Better not say it's your last time, something always happens!"

"Who's superstitious now?" jeered Renée.

"I'm not!" laughed Carlisle. "Though it's small wonder with all this talk about the White Lady floating around. When Miss Luval asked me about it the other day, I told her I knew nothing; but since then it seems 's if I had heard about nothing else!"

Fatty, pushed by Renée, suddenly dragged her toes into the ground, and the sled stopped so unexpectedly that Renée, taken by surprise, actually sat down backward upon the snowy ground.

"Looka here, you-all, Fatty," began Renée. But

Fatty, pulling herself erect, merely waved at her, looking intently at Carlisle.

"Listen, Carlisle," said Fatty, in a lowered voice, "I'm beginning *to* think there is something to this White Lady scare, after all!"

"What do you mean?" Two pairs of startled eyes were fixed upon the stout girl's sober countenance as Renée and Carlisle drew closer to her.

"I wasn't going to mention it." Fatty told them mysteriously, "but last night I woke up 'bout midnight, and really there were the awfulest groans all around me. Queer groans they were, neither here nor there. Golly-gosh, I certainly did wish, then, I had a room mate! Room mates are nuisances, but they're awful handy at times!"

Renée and Carlisle exchanged glances. "I'll say they are!" exclaimed the former fervently. "But, Fatty," her voice dropped, "did you *really* hear these groans or did you just dream them?"

"I really heard them!" insisted Fatty. She shuddered, and the others shuddered, too, partly from nervous excitement, partly from cold, for the sun was sending long, level blue shadows now across the snowy meadow below and the tree Fatty had mentioned stood out gaunt and sombre against the darkening scene.

"Isn't that the limit, girls!" It was Julie's voice which broke into the thoughtful little silence that had followed upon Fatty's words. Barbara, stalking up after her room mate, stopped short upon perceiving Carlisle's presence in the group, and, bending over,

pretended to adjust the woolen socks rolled down over her stockings above her shoe tops.

"What is, Julie?" Carlisle glanced up.

Julie commenced to laugh. "Why, Kitty Evans, down our corridor—down your corridor, too, Fatty, so you must have heard her last night—got a box of candy from her father, and she and Margaret Dale, instead of inviting anyone to have some, pigged the whole box themselves. Kitty woke up with the most terrible toothache—scared everyone to death with her loud groans and——"

She was interrupted by a burst of laughter, while Fatty's face became a study. Carlisle jumped to her feet and pointed at her merrily.

"Susan Smith, go to the head of the class!" she cried. "The White Lady's groans, forsooth!"

Julie stared from one to the other. "The White Lady?" She began to chuckle, while even Barbara's grave face, behind her, broke into a smile. "Fatty hasn't been telling you she heard the White Lady groaning, has she?"

"Not only told us, but swore it!" laughed Carlisle. She shook her finger at the reddening Fatty and spoke in Mrs. Lawtry's most impressive manner. "Fie, fie, Susan, to scare your little playmates thus! C'm'on, Renée, this is no place for us—Fatty's fairy tales might give us the nightmare, to-night, and I need the sleep—there's an exam in algebra to-morrow! Hey—clear the way! Clear the way, there!" And Carlisle, upon her sled, with Renée piled on top of her, clutching at her shoulders, sent her voice ringing down the hill.

"I'm off, too," said Barbara in a low voice to Julie, as Carlisle and Renée shot away. With her graceful, crouching slide, Barbara obtained the momentum she needed and glided away, also.

"Skiing looks so easy," began Julie enviously, watching her room mate.

"Doesn't it!" agreed Fatty as enviously. She sighed. "But it's no sport for a fat person," she added.

The next instant both she and Julie gasped. Their horrified eyes saw an up-coming couple, dragging a sled behind them, squarely in the path of the slide—stupid little Mary Fillmore and Katherine Robb! They saw Carlisle swerve wildly to avoid them, and crash, instead, into the fatal tree. Then, with blanched faces, they saw Barbara, upon her skis, rushing down, down, and no opening left for her descent, for the tree, the smashed sled, the two helpless figures flung directly into *her* path, the stupid, staring figures of Mary and Katherine, together with her terrific speed which gave her no chance to swerve aside into the deeper snow, left her but one course of procedure. And as Julie and Fatty gaped, tried to cry out futile warnings, they saw Barbara's slender figure literally gather itself together, leap into the air upon her skis and, clearing Carlisle's motionless body, alight upon the slide beyond her. There was a marvelous recovery of balance, then Barbara shot on down the hill, while Julie, wringing her hands, tumbled down toward the scene of the accident.

"Hey, wait—go down on the sled with me!" called out Fatty hoarsely. But Julie only shook her head speechlessly and went on. Fatty, groaning, started her

sled and passed her halfway down. When Julie arrived beside the tree, she found Carlisle already sitting up, a dazed expression upon her face, down which blood was pouring from a bad cut upon her cheek, while Fatty, pale-faced, was bending over Renée.

"She—she must be unconscious!" gasped Fatty, glancing up terrifiedly at Julie. "Stupid kid!" She pointed, with a violent gesture, at the open-mouthed Mary Fillmore. "Don't you ever come near *me* again! Why in the world did you have to walk on the slide?—You've been told enough to keep off from it!"

"I—I—I——" stammered Mary Fillmore. She began to cry and was led away by Katherine, who kept casting resentful glances over her shoulder all the way down the hill at the "big girls, who thought they were so much!"

Barbara, breathless from her hurried climb back, spoke sharply to Julie. "Run down and get Miss Cameron!" she said. She dropped to her knees upon the snow beside Renée and, snatching up a handful, commenced to rub her face. "I think she's only been knocked breathless," she went on quietly to Fatty, as Julie started away obediently. By this time other girls had rushed up—there was quite a crowd around Renée. "Better stand back," Barbara told them. "Give her a chance, girls!"

Somehow her quiet voice, her lack of excitement, kept in check any panic which might have ensued. Someone very matter-of-factly offered Carlisle a clean handkerchief for her cheek, someone else suggested lifting Renée upon a sled and drawing her back to the

school—a suggestion at which Barbara frowned, however.

"Better wait until Miss Cameron comes—better not move her until we are sure she is *not* hurt! Internally, I mean—although I don't know whether Miss Cameron can tell or not!"

Although she did not glance at Carlisle, Barbara was acutely conscious of the other girl, longed to offer to help her, and did not dare for fear of being rebuffed. It was Fatty who helped Carlisle to her feet, who told her shakily to lean on her and started her slowly back to the Infirmary.

"Oh, here, wait a second, Carlisle—here, hold on to her, Helen!" Fatty stopped suddenly, gave Helen a commanding look, and, peeling off her heavy coat, ran back with it to place it gently over Renée. "Don't let the little thing get cold! She's a cute kid!" said Fatty incoherently. And ignoring Barbara's quick, appreciative glance, she ran back to Carlisle.

They met Miss Cameron halfway across the meadow, as the school nurse, with Julie, hurried toward them.

"That's right, Helen, Susan—take her right on up to the Infirmary—I shall be right back!" directed Miss Cameron.

When the nurse had reached the little group of girls beside the tree, her keen glance took in the fact that it was Barbara who was in charge, Barbara who had succeeded in getting Renée onto Fatty's coat, Barbara's steady voice directing, explaining, soothing.

"Well, well, what's all this?" asked Miss Cameron cheerfully, bending over Renée, who at that moment gave a long, shuddering gasp and opened her eyes. With quick, deft fingers, the nurse made sure that no bones were broken, finished her examination with a little reassuring pat. "Where'd you hit, Renée—didn't hurt your head, dear, did you?"

Renée, stirring slowly, vaguely shook her head. "No," she muttered.

"I don't believe you did, either," agreed Miss Cameron, in a relieved tone, pulling back on the scarlet cap she had removed to make sure. "Why, Renée, I think you've just merely had the breath knocked out of you!" The nurse rose to her feet, glanced smilingly around at the circle of pale faces. "Goodness," she exclaimed, "I've seen it happen dozens of times on the football field! Now, scamper, all of you girls! The bell rang quite a while ago! Barbara and Julie and I will see to Renée!"

As the other pupils, with exclamations, scattered back toward the school, Miss Cameron looked down at Renée. "Want us to pull you down on a sled?" she asked gaily.

But Renée, shaking her head, sat up dizzily.

"Let her alone," ordered Miss Cameron, as Barbara and Julie protested. "She'll be all right in a moment or so! Well, you can help her to her feet, if you like. Now—you take her beneath the arm, Barbara—Julie, bring those coats and things—no, leave that sled, I'll ask Mr. Atterton to come up for it—it's only firewood, now, anyway!" Miss Cameron laughed. "How do

you feel, wounded hero?" she inquired, supporting Renée upon the side opposite from Barbara.

Renée gave a game little chuckle. "I feel," she said weakly, "I feel as though—now—I knew how Ca'lisle's slippah felt when it flew—out into that church aisle last—Sunday!"

CHAPTER IX

A SNEAK'S WAY

BUT for the fact of February fourteenth approaching, with the additional excitement of planning a masquerade which Miss Luval had promised the Harwood Hall girls, Carlisle's and Renée's accident might have caused more of a ripple in the current of school life than it did. As it was, however, even the engrossing theme of Barbara's wonderful jump upon her skis, to prevent a more serious accident, was submerged in the newer, more thrilling discussions concerning the relative merits of cheesecloth versus crêpe paper for costumes. Exciting glimpses of half-finished costumes, of red paper hearts, began to be caught every time a bedroom door was opened, Carlisle went around for days with a mirror, anxiously watching the healing of the cut upon her cheek—for a Fairy Queen with a wounded cheek was not to be thought of!—while Fatty garbled French lessons in an absent-minded way that drove Mademoiselle almost wild, for no costume at all seemed to suit poor Fatty's proportions, and she was worried in consequence.

At last, however, the morning of St. Valentine's Day itself dawned, gray and snow-threatening. Carlisle, jumping out of bed, could be heard mysteriously

fumbling articles upon the dressing table, until finally Renée woke up with a start.

"Ca'lisle, what on earth are you-all doin'?" she called sleepily.

Carlisle turned around with the inevitable hand mirror in her grasp. "I'm just trying to see if that cut *does* show!" she answered impatiently. "Oh, dear—a spangled costume and a face like a prize fighter's don't go together at all! See, Renée—what do you think?" She approached her room mate's bed for an anxious inspection.

Renée, shivering, reluctantly sat up in bed to pull Carlisle toward her, squinting her dark eyes in the vague light.

"Br-r-r, it's cold!" she shuddered. "Why, it hardly shows, Ca'lisle," she added slowly. "Anyway, what will it matter?—we're going to wear masks, you know."

"It *does* show, then!" ejaculated Carlisle discouragedly. "I can tell from your tone, Renée! Oh, goodness, why did I ever go sliding that day! Oh, why did that perfectly horrid, stupid little Mary Fillmore have to get in the way!"

"Accidents are almost always caused by someone's stupidity," replied Renée wisely. "But really-truly, Ca'lisle, youah costume is so lovely that no one will evah notice that little cut on youah cheek! Oh, lawsy," she jumped hurriedly out of bed, "I nevah will get used to this cold No'th!"

"Cold North!" Carlisle, from behind the soapy wash cloth with which she was scouring her neck,

laughed shortly. "You just ought to be in Jonesville in the winter, where the plumbing almost always freezes and you have to wait for the men to come around and thaw the pipes out by electricity. And you just don't feel your nose or your cheeks frosting until they begin to turn white!"

Renée, dashing into her clothes, glanced at her room mate with a horrified expression. "I can't see why anyone would evah want to live in Jonesville," she remarked, "if it's as bad as you-all say!"

"You live where you're put, generally," said Carlisle. "And most always you can't help yourself. I've been one of the lucky ones—thanks to Mother!"

"Your mother must be wonderful," began Renée, whose motherless ears never tired of hearing Carlisle talk about her home life.

"She's a good mother," replied Carlisle. "Say, listen, Renée, it's going to be sort of stupid, to-night, at the party, don't you think, with no outsiders at all allowed to come?"

Renée shook her head. "I don't believe so," she said contentedly, brushing her black, silky hair with vigorous strokes. "You'll be surprised to discovah how few of the girls you'll know when they're masked!"

Carlisle's face broke into a smile. "Well, there's one person I'm sure I can guess," she began. "Oh, hurry up, Renée, there's the breakfast bell! Mercy, I didn't know it was so late—why, the rising bell must have rung already! And Old Constitution's gone down; I

heard her fairylike tread go past our door!—There's one person who can't disguise her identity."

"Who? Me? That's not fair!" exclaimed Renée, trying to fasten a too-tight strap on her pump and failing. "Where's the buttonhook? Ca'lisle, wait—where's the buttonhook?"

Carlisle, about to disappear through the door, came back hurriedly. "I don't know! Oh, goodness, we'll be late for breakfast, Renée—can't you hop on one foot? Where *is* that buttonhook?"

"You're so disorderly, Ca'lisle—we're nevah able to find a thing!" grumbled Renée, sweeping her hands through the mass of jumbled objects upon the dressing table.

"You're not so orderly yourself!" flared up Carlisle sharply. "Oh, there it is, Renée! I used it to stop that window from rattling last night—remember?" Rushing over, she pried the object of their search from its crack.

Renée took it gratefully. "Oh, thank you, Ca'lisle! Whose costume *can* you guess? Mine's not fair, because you know it!" She shrieked this after the departing Carlisle.

"You'll be la-ate!" called back the other warningly from the corridor. "It's Fatty's costume, you little dumbbell—everyone'll know *her*! How can she disguise herself to-night?"

"Is that so?" inquired Fatty's voice sarcastically as she burst out of her room in time to hear Carlisle's last remark. "Well, you may be surprised!"

"I may be a white elephant!" shrieked Renée. "Or

a purple cow! But I won't be surprised, nor Ca'lisle, eithah—so don't fool yourse'f, Fatty! Oh, bothah, that button's done gone and busted! Well, I'll jes' have to take a chance!"

And with the heels of her unfastened pump dropping to the floor at every step, Renée ran after the others.

All day there were excited consultations among the girls at every class bell, all day lessons were recited sketchily and with amazing substitutions, as when Miss Frost, the English teacher, asked Fatty what Portia had said about the quality of mercy and Fatty, looking up with a start from the pad upon which she had been drawing idly, replied, "Pink muslin, I think! Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Frost, what did you say?" and subsided, blushing violently, in her chair.

"I'm afraid your mind is upon to-night's festivity rather than upon your lesson, Susan," answered Miss Frost leniently. "Will you tell Susan, Carlisle?"

"The quality of mercy is justice," commenced Carlisle glibly, yet with an absent-minded expression upon her face, too, and a clutch at the little pocket mirror which she had been using behind the broad screen of Fatty's back.

Indeed, both teachers and pupils united in one vast sigh of relief when the three o'clock bell rang that day, and the corridors were filled with chattering, excited, laughing girls.

"Listen, Renée!" Carlisle pulled her room mate aside with a nervous gesture. "I'm going to ask Miss Nancy for a sheet and pillow case—I'm not going to wear that other costume—why spoil it with my face?

—and the sheet and pillow case will hide me completely."

"Oh, Ca'lisle, I wouldn't," began Renée. But the other shook a stubborn head and dashed away. Ten minutes later, Miss Nancy, trotting into the morning room, glanced back at a pleading young face.

"Sheet and pillow case, Carlisle?" she repeated doubtfully. "Why, I don't know. There must be some old ones in the linen closet. Let's go up and see!"

With her usual kindliness, she led the way. At the door to the linen closet, however, she stopped short. "Oh, bother, Mrs. Lawtry has the key! Run down and ask her for it, will you, Carlisle? I'll wait here, child!"

It was with the utmost reluctance, though, that Carlisle approached Mrs. Lawtry's door and knocked. She made a little face at the tartness of the voice which said, "Come in!"

"Sheet and pillow case, Carlisle?" Mrs. Lawtry repeated it as Miss Nancy had done, but with how different an expression upon her face! Her sharp nose seemed to fairly twitch with impatient disapproval, and her long, narrow eyes stared back coldly at the pretty eager young face before her. "It's ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous, this party!" fumed the teacher. "Not one pupil made a decent recitation to-day! If I had *my* way there'd be a little more work done at Harwood Hall and less play!"

"Thank goodness, you haven't your way!" thought Carlisle. Aloud, she said politely, "Have you the key,

Mrs. Lawtry? Miss Nancy is waiting upstairs for me."

Very reluctantly, as though it hurt her to do even that much of a favor for anyone, the lady gloomily opened a drawer to her desk and produced the big, old-fashioned key.

"There you are," she said sourly, handing it to Carlisle. "Now, I hope I shall not be disturbed again!"

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you," apologized Carlisle, hastily backing out of the dreary room. Her only answer was an ungracious sniff and the decided closing of Mrs. Lawtry's door.

Late that afternoon the big study hall, which Miss Luval had turned over to the girls, resounded with happy laughter and a deafening buzz of conversation.

"Hand me that hammer, Fatty, and stop your posing!" shouted Carlisle from the top of a step ladder. She glanced around smilingly as she waited for the other girl to find the hammer. The place was aglow with soft lights, there was a bustling, joyous atmosphere quite different from the ordinary studious one, for the girls were all working industriously with red shades and festoons of red paper hearts, and the result was really lovely.

"I wasn't posing!" contradicted Fatty at this point. "I was just thinking——"

Carlisle, reaching for the hammer Fatty was languidly thrusting at her, pretended to collapse upon her ladder top, while Renée and Julie, near by, equally overcome, fell into each other's arms in mock amazement.

"Fatty was *thinking*!" said Carlisle, in an awed voice. "Fatty was——"

"Don't be so witty," said Fatty disgustedly. "Here, do you want this hammer or not?"

"Thinking about——what?" inquired Julie solemnly. "Thinking about—pink muslin?" And she and Renée went off into peals of laughter again.

From the other side of the study hall, where she was tacking garlands of red paper hearts across the windows, Barbara turned and watched the gay little group half enviously, half sadly.

"They seem to be having an awfully good time," she observed to Helen Benedict, with a gesture in Carlisle's direction.

"Don't they!" agreed Helen placidly.

Barbara glanced at her almost impatiently. "It wouldn't matter to her if those girls never spoke to her!" she thought. "Oh, why can't I be like Helen and just not care! But I can't be—I can't be!" And her dark, thin face drooped until she caught Helen's surprised glance upon her, when she straightened up and began to tack the pretty decorations into place once more.

"How big the study hall looks without its desks," she remarked self-consciously. "Mr. Atterton didn't take long to remove them. Where did he put them all? Surely not 'way down in the basement."

"No, he stored them on the stage up there." Helen nodded in that direction. "The desks are not screwed to the floor, you know, because this place is used for assemblies."

"But there is an exit on that side of the stage," said Barbara in a puzzled voice. "Why should he store them there? In case of fire, I should think it would be awkward."

"Janitors aren't noted for brain work," answered Helen, with an amused look. "Besides, in case of fire, there are more exits and about thirty windows not very far distant from the ground in this place! Say, listen, Barbara," she continued in a lowered voice, "don't you think it's sort of crumby—our not being allowed to ask outsiders to-night?"

"The day pupils are coming, aren't they?" said Barbara indifferently. "It doesn't matter to me, anyway," she added laughingly. "I don't know a soul to invite!"

"Well, I do." And now it was Helen's turn to look self-conscious. "I know an awfully nice boy here in town—a son of one of Mother's old friends—and I think it's sort of a shame not to be able to have him come. Dancing with—with just girls is sort of uninspiring!"

"I hadn't thought," began Barbara. "You know, Helen, I feel sure it's on account of that military academy here in town," she went on hurriedly.

"Of course it is," replied Helen indignantly. "But it seems a shame that the rest of us have to suffer because of silly girls like Ki——" She stopped short, bit her lip, and, turning away, began to fasten up some dangling hearts.

"You mean Kitty Evans, don't you?" Barbara asked her in a low tone. "I won't say anything, Helen—

though everyone, except the teachers, knows how silly she's being, I guess."

"I do mean Kitty," returned Helen, in an angry whisper. "I wish to goodness she'd get out of school."

"She may, sooner than she expects," said Barbara, with a significant look. "Don't you care, Helen—I'll be a handsome gallant to your lady to-night!"

"Coming as a man?" asked Helen inquisitively. But Barbara would only laugh and shake her head.

Meanwhile, Fatty had been making desperate efforts to escape unnoticed from the study hall. Three times had she been foiled, three times called back by someone's merry summons. But at last she succeeded in gaining the corridor outside, and mounted, with surprising speed, the stairs to her own room.

Having gained that haven, she locked her door, and, removing her masquerade costume from the closet, she spread it out upon her bed, to gaze at it with loving eyes. But she was not long allowed to enjoy it in peace. Someone, with a smart rat-a-tat upon the door, bespoke an entrance. There was an impatient turning of the knob, until Fatty spoke hurriedly.

"Wait a minute! I'll let you in, in just a minute!"

Wildly she glanced toward the closet, wildly she snatched up her costume. Bearing it over her head, not to besmirch its crispness, she thrust it back upon its rod. Then she trod heavily toward the door.

To her surprise, when she threw it open, it was not one of her intimates who desired admittance, but Kitty Evans who entered airily. Fatty stepped back not any too well pleased, for she had no use for Kitty and did

not mind the other's knowing it. Kitty, however, took no notice of Fatty's reluctant welcome. She plunged at once into voluble explanation for her presence there.

"Say, listen, Fat—I mean, Susan! Someone told me you had an extra costume for the masquerade to-night—a costume you had found too tight," she began.

Fatty nodded stiffly. "As a matter of fact I have *three*," she said a little bitterly. "All too tight for me!"

"Oh, fine!" exclaimed Kitty. "Then you won't mind lending one?" She smiled at Fatty so suavely that the other was incensed.

"Well, I——" began Fatty, in a grudging voice.

"You see," swept on Kitty, pretending not to see her hostess's hesitation, "Peggy Dale, up to this last minute, has sworn she wasn't going to the party to-night—kept saying she'd had a perfectly punk time last year and what was the use of bothering with a costume this year. Well, now," Kitty paused to chuckle sociably, "she's decided she wants to go, and lo!" Kitty made a dramatic gesture, "there is no costume ready for her. So hearing about your extra one"—Kitty paused impressively—"I decided to come down here and ask you to lend it to her."

"Well, I——" commenced Fatty, again.

"We'd return it to-morrow morning," interrupted Kitty impatiently. "And if it's the least bit mussed or soiled, of course, we'll have it cleaned for you!"

"Well, I——" Fatty attempted once more.

"For that matter," broke in Kitty, in an injured

voice, "we could even return it to you to-night, as soon as everyone unmasked!"

"What I've been trying to tell you," said Fatty desperately, "is that all three of those costumes are down in Barbara's and Julie's room! They have been helping Miss Nancy cut out all the paper hearts for the decorations and I told Julie not to bother about a costume, or Barbara either, for I'd let them use mine. But, of course, there will be one left over." Fatty paused thoughtfully.

"Well, for goodness' sake, Susan Smith, why on earth didn't you say so at first!" exclaimed Kitty, in a disgusted tone. And, slipping off from the end of Fatty's bed, she switched indignantly out of the room.

Fatty stood staring at the empty doorway for a surprised instant, then she lumbered over to the threshold to poke her head around the casing, to catch a glimpse of Kitty disappearing around the corner toward the room occupied by Julie and Barbara.

"There's nerve for you!" murmured Fatty to herself. "I only hope she doesn't bully Barbara or Julie out of the costumes they want! I'd better—yes, I guess I'll go down and see."

To her amazement and disgust upon entering Julie's room quietly a moment or so later, she discovered it unoccupied by its owners, with *Kitty ransacking Julie's closet.* At Fatty's entrance, the other girl started violently, then turned upon her furiously.

"What do you mean, coming here to snoop around like this and scaring a person half to death!" she scolded.

"And what do *you* mean by snooping in other people's closets when you know they have something hidden there they don't want you to see?" demanded Fatty sternly. "I call it poison mean to come here and poke and pry until you find out what Barbara and Julie are going to wear to the masquerade to-night!"

"Much I care what they're going to wear!" retorted Kitty, in an angry voice. "All I want is some sort of a costume for—for Margaret! Here, can't you get it out of Julie's wardrobe? You've seen it and know, and she won't blame her sweet little girl friend for 'poking and prying'!"

"No, I can't!" returned Fatty bluntly. "If you want to borrow that costume from Julie, you'll just stick around and ask her for it when she comes up!"

"But she may not be up to dress for dinner for a long time," protested Kitty, her voice dropping into a whine like that of a spoiled child. Fatty, eyeing her grimly, wondered how anyone except her family could like her.

"What do you care? You don't have to catch a train to-night," was all she said. But her folded arms and her air of settling herself upon Julie's bed showed determination to stay and protect her friend's property from unscrupulous hands. There was an uncomfortable silence, Kitty spending it in moving nervously from one window to another. Fortunately, however, neither girl's patience was tried for long. Soon, there was a rush of feet outside, in the corridor, laughing voices, and Julie and grave Barbara entered.

They stopped at sight of their unexpected visitors.

Then Julie's quick glance went from her partly open closet door, which Kitty had forgotten to close, back to rest in shocked surprise upon Kitty's self-conscious face.

"Why——" began Julie, in a puzzled voice.

Kitty held up a white hand, upon which flashed the too-ornate rings Miss Luval deplored. "Now, don't get mad, Julie," she said coolly. "I asked Fatty to lend me one of her extra costumes, and she said they were all in here, so we came in to look for the extra one—the one you won't want—then we decided to wait until you and Barbara came up from downstairs."

Fatty turned and stared at Kitty in speechless amusement, while Julie, only half-satisfied, shot a questioning glance at Barbara. It was Barbara, then, who coming slowly forward, stared straight into Kitty's averted face.

"Did you see the costumes Julie and I are going to wear to-night?" she demanded sternly.

"Mercy, all this fuss about costumes!" exclaimed Kitty irritably. "Really, I think you're carrying the secrecy and the surprise *too* far, you girls! I'm not at all interested in the costumes you are going to wear to-night! Now, may I or may I not have that extra costume?"

"Half the fun in a masquerade is not having people know you! And one extra person in the secret of your costume may spoil it!" returned Barbara, in a quiet, significant tone. She crossed over to the window seat and lifted its hinged lid. "Of course you may have the extra costume," she added. "Julie and I are not dogs

in the manger!" So saying, she drew out a folded bundle which, when opened for inspection, proved to be a short, fluffy ballet dress.

Kitty gazed in inexplicable disappointment at the low-cut neck, the tight basque waist, the long white silk tights that went with the pretty outfit.

"Oh, that won't do!" she said almost tearfully. "I know——well, I know Peggy Dale won't wear *that*!"

"Why not?" asked Fatty bluntly. "Suppose we have Peggy come up and decide for herself?" she proposed suddenly. "She's little and cute, and I should say this costume would just about do for her. Let's ask her!"

But Kitty, with an alarmed expression, moved hurriedly toward the door. "No!" she exclaimed. "You see—you see," she explained gropingly, "I don't want her—her to know that I've been to you for an extra costume! That's it," Kitty's tone was relieved. "Really, girls! Peggy'd be as mad as hops if she knew I was around begging for her like this!"

The other girls exchanged glances. Somehow, Kitty's story sounded lame.

"I know this won't do, though," went on Kitty briskly. Her voice dropped discouragedly. "Well, I—I guess Peggy'll just have to not go to-night, that's all!" There was a little silence, then she turned pleadingly to the other girls. "Can't one of you wear this costume and let me look at the one you've decided upon?" she asked.

Soft-hearted Julie looked at her sympathetically. "Why, I—surely——" she began promptly. And Kitty, her hands clasped to her breast, took a quick

step toward her. But Barbara's voice broke in rather grimly.

"It's too bad, Kitty; but we've both decided upon our costumes and I guess we'll stick to our choice. If Margaret Dale wants this one, she is perfectly welcome to it. If she doesn't, why, then——" And Barbara shrugged.

Kitty turned a little pale, and the glance she bestowed upon Barbara was an angry one. But the latter, unmoved, commenced to fold up the rejected costume.

"It won't do, that's all!" said Kitty, in a dull, hopeless manner, moving toward the door again with a despairing gesture not warranted by the circumstances, Fatty thought shrewdly.

"I don't see why it won't do," repeated Fatty stubbornly.

Kitty whirled around upon the threshold. Two bright spots sprang into her cheeks. "I tell you it won't do and that's enough!" she shrilled, in a high voice. "Why—why—" she panted, clenching her fists and staring at her astonished class mates with dilated eyes —"why do you insist when I tell—you—I—don't—want—it!"

"Here, here, what's all this fuss about?" said a pleasant voice behind Kitty, at this point. And Miss Nancy, gently pushing the trembling, angry girl back into Julie's room, stepped inside. Walking over to a chair, with an inquiring glance at the bundle in Barbara's hands, she seated herself and pulled Kitty before

her, placing an arm around her. "What's the matter, Kitty? What don't you want?"

Unexpectedly, Kitty burst into tears. "That—that—old costume there!" She pointed. "I told them and told them I didn't want it!"

The other girls exchanged stares. "Why, we only ——" began Fatty.

"Yet they're trying to make me take it! It's a horrible costume! I loathe it!" sobbed Kitty passionately.

Miss Nancy eyed the shaking, sob-wrenched little figure before her with a puzzled surprise equaled only by that of Kitty's class mates.

"But, Kitty," she said gently, at last, "no one is going to *make* you take anything you don't want! Now, listen, dear, what is this all about? Are you minus a costume for to-night? Is that it?"

Kitty's sobs were lessening; but her face remained hidden, buried in her hands. At last she nodded.

"She said she wanted the costume for Margaret Dale, who hasn't any because she had decided not to go to the masquerade," explained Fatty pacifically.

Kitty, at the sound of Fatty's voice, gave an impatient jerk; but Miss Nancy's arm remained too firmly in place for her to achieve the escape she obviously wished to make.

"And Kitty thinks this costume not suited for Margaret—is that it?" continued Miss Nancy.

The other girls nodded soberly. Kitty's weeping had worn itself out, now. She stood in sullen silence. Miss Nancy pondered thoughtfully for a moment, then she looked up brightly.

"I have it, Kitty! Why not let Margaret go in sheet and pillow case like Car—as some of the others are planning to do? That is always a splendid last-minute masquerade costume for anyone!"

Kitty's hands dropped to her sides. Her tear-puffed eyelids gave her the appearance of a little girl whose toy had been broken. But she gazed into Miss Nancy's face with growing eagerness and relief upon her own.

"Wh-why, that m-might do," she gulped. "It—it hides all of you, doesn't it?"

Miss Nancy nodded. "If you arrange the sheet to do so," she agreed. She rose. "Now, come with me and we'll go right up to the linen closet and see if there are any more old sheets and pillow cases—holes will have to be cut in the latter for Margaret's eyes and nose and mouth, you know, because she will wear it over her head."

Kitty glanced obliquely at the other girls as she followed kind Miss Nancy from the room. "I'm sorry everyone has to know about this costume!" she snapped spitefully.

"Can't be helped, puss!" laughed Miss Nancy. She looked keenly over her shoulder at the three girls who remained. "And of course no one will mention whom this sheet and pillow case are for!" She made it a statement rather than a question, and everyone nodded.

But as soon as the door had closed behind Kitty, Fatty faced the others dramatically. "Well, can you beat that!" she ejaculated. "I'll tell the world that girl has a method all her own in getting what she wants!"

Barbara, crossing the room to replace the ballet costume where it had been stored, glanced down at it with puzzled eyes.

"But why on earth do you suppose Kitty flew into such a tantrum about it?" she remarked. "Except that the waist part might have to be taken in here and there, I should have thought this outfit would have just suited Margaret Dale!"

No one could solve the mystery, and after awhile Fatty, downing an inclination to relate the true circumstances of Kitty's visit to their room and wisely deciding not to add any fuel to the flame of their dislike, bade the others good-bye and went silently back to her own room.

"Phew!" It was Julie who presently dashed over to throw open the windows. "That's the worst—and probably the most expensive—perfume I ever got a whiff of!"

"What do you mean—whiff?" Barbara pretended to fall into her chair, overcome. "I'm being slowly asphyxiated! Stand aside, Julie, and let the great, wonderful outdoors sweep in for a little, to clear out the air!"

"Just—a—minute!" Julie's tone was so absent that Barbara got up promptly and strolled over to the window, where her room mate was leaning out in a perilous fashion. "See that?" asked Julie, pointing.

Barbara squinted. "I don't see any——"

"Look, you poor bat!" Julie gestured excitedly, though she kept her voice lowered. "Isn't that Kitty's and Margaret's room?"

"Yes, it is!' And now excitement crept into Barbara's tone. "What in the world! What is that, Julie —a package being lowered from Kitty's window?"

"It certainly is," said Julie. "Isn't that someone—look, Babs!—standing below there, near that rain pipe? Of course it is! Good gracious, I'll bet Kitty wanted that sheet and pillow case for——"

"Hush!" said Barbara imperatively. "There—whoever it is has taken the package off the rope—you can't see the rope; but there must be one, that package went down so slowly!"

"Who can it be?" Julie pulled herself back and stared at her room mate.

"I don't know!" Barbara shook her head, her eyes staring out into the darkness as she vainly tried to pierce it. "Whoever it was, he or she has escaped by way of those bushes at the end of the school grounds! Well," and now Barbara inched her long figure back into the room, "she's a fine specimen of an honor girl—that Kitty Evans!"

"She's bright enough!" said Julie indifferently. "Guess it wasn't hard for her to earn the good marks; but she hasn't an atom of honor about her! Silly kid! She'd better watch *her* step! What do you s'pose was in that package, Babs?"

Barbara slammed down the windows. "Isn't that the dinner gong?" she exclaimed. "Let's just wash up and wait until we dress for the masquerade, to dress! What was in that package? Why, the sheet and pillow case, of course!"

CHAPTER X

MASQUERADE

SOFT lights, music from the sweet throat of a violin and the deeper chords of harp and piano, subdued laughter as fantastic figures danced together or slowly promenaded in pairs or little groups around the edge of the big study hall—all these greeted the eager eyes and ears of a slender figure in white who paused in the doorway to sweep the assembly with her gaze from behind the protection of a tiny white spangled mask. No one noticed her at first, then a dashing Cavalier in green cheese cloth came up to bow ceremoniously before her and to offer her "his" arm in silence.

Carlisle, in the Fairy Queen costume she had decided to wear, after all, stifled a laugh, for she was sure she recognized Helen Benedict behind the green mask.

"Wouldst walk with me, good sir?" she squeaked, in a high, falsetto voice, waving her glittering wand as she dropped a curtsey.

The Cavalier nodded gravely, flapped the elbow of his extended arm meaningly. With another chuckle, Carlisle accepted it and was at once swept into the throng of promenaders.

Her interested inspection revealed all sorts of pretty costumes—a Venetian Girl danced with a Colonial Gentleman, a Court Lady of Queen Elizabeth's time in high ruff and panniered skirts hung coquettishly upon the arm of an Indian Chief in full regalia of Navajo blanket and feathers, a Pierrette in dainty black and white whispered from behind her mask to—not Pierrot, but to a Clown whose grotesquely whitened face and painted cheeks almost offset the need for a mask. There were Queens of Hearts galore, with a few plain dominoes and masks interspersed. To Carlisle's surprise, there was only one costume which she could identify—that belonged to Renée—a really lovely one of a Butterfly in various pastel shades of cheesecloth. The other figures were as mysterious as though she had never seen them before.

"Lovely, isn't it!" Carlisle broke the silence in her high, affected voice as the music ended and the dancers scattered to the chairs around the edge of the room.

"Lovely!" agreed the Cavalier in a deep bass voice as false as Carlisle's high one. "He" glanced meaningly at her through "his" green mask. "And so are you!" was added with a low bow.

Carlisle giggled. "You do that very nicely, Helen," she observed, dropping unconsciously into her own voice.

The Cavalier, however, shook "his" head. "I'm not Helen," was answered, then, with the deep, bass voice maintained. And with another bow, "he" was gone.

Carlisle was standing stock still, gazing after the green back as it disappeared into the crowd and noticing then, that the Cavalier was both taller and thinner than Helen Benedict, when an outfit in pink sailed up to her.

"Well, who are you?" squeaked Carlisle, wondering how Fatty ever could have hoped to disguise her proportions in the costume of a Turkish harem beauty.

The one in pink shook her head, held out a little pad, which Carlisle bent over to read, in the dim red light, "I know you. You are Carlisle Martin."

A little chagrined, Carlisle glanced up into a perfectly baffling pink satin mask which covered the other's entire face. She snatched at the pencil the other held out accommodatingly and scrawled, "I know you. You are Fatty Smith!"

But the other shook her head vehemently, bowed awkwardly, and was gone. And a little later Carlisle was quite dumbfounded to see *two* Turkish harem beauties, dressed exactly alike in pink, parading around the room together! She reached out and plucked the Butterfly by her flying draperies.

"Wouldn't you say that one of those Turkish girls was Fatty?" she whispered huskily.

Renée, brought to a sudden halt by her room mate's detaining hand, glanced in the direction of her pointing finger and uttered an exclamation.

"But which one?" she muttered back, in a puzzled voice.

Carlisle laughed and let her go, still gaping after

the two ladies from Turkey, who seemed to be enjoying the sensation they were creating.

The music commencing again, and her mysterious green Cavalier appearing at her elbow, Carlisle danced off with "him" and found that she had chosen an excellent partner.

"You lead awfully well for a girl," she observed, in the high tones she flattered herself disguised her voice.

A brief chuckle agitated the green ruffles upon the Cavalier's "manly" chest. "How do you know I am a girl?" was the surprising parry.

Carlisle drew back in the other's arms to stare readily up at the green mask. Only the equally steady gaze of the other's eyes met her puzzled inspection, and for the life of her she could not recognize those eyes. Not Fatty's gray ones—but then, this masker was too thin, anyway, for Fatty!—nor Julie's blue ones, nor Renée's dark ones, nor yet Helen Benedict's hazel ones!

"Well—are you a day pupil?" probed Carlisle, after they had danced a little while in silence.

The green Cavalier shook "his" head.

"No?" Carlisle frowned, searched her memory. "Miss Luval said no outsiders could come, so I know you're not a boy invited by one of the Harwood Hall girls."

Again silence met her remarks. Carlisle grew a little uncomfortable beneath the teasing scrutiny of those eyes behind the green mask.

"What would you do if I snatched off your mask,

all at once?" she inquired naughtily, forgetting to squeak.

The gaze of the Cavalier narrowed. "Snatch your fairy wand and give you a thorough spanking with it—so better not try that stunt!" was the stern reply.

Carlisle looked up sidelong. "Come, now," she wheedled, "give me just a hint as to who you are!"

The silence lasted so long this time that she became rather nettled. At last, however, the other spoke above the music. "Well, I'm not—Southern," said the Cavalier, laughter in the deep tones.

Carlisle shook her head. "I'll have to give up!" she said in mock despair, as the music ended. "I'll just have to wait until we unmask!"

The Cavalier in green laughed silently a moment. Then, with one of "his" ceremonious bows, "he" turned upon his heel and left her.

Carlisle clutched at the Butterfly, passing her at that moment. "Renée," she hissed, "who on earth is that in the green cheesecloth?"

Renée giggled. "Lawsy, Ca'lisle, don't tell me that you of all people don't know who *that* is!" Shrugging her shoulders, she slipped away from the detaining hand.

During the merry hours which followed, although Carlisle solved the mystery of many of her class mates' disguises, she could not discover the enigmatic identity of the Cavalier in green. It was Julie who was the Venetian Flower Girl, Kitty Evans the Indian Chief—Carlisle recognized the blanket Kitty and her father had brought back with them from a trip to Arizona

one winter—but who on earth the Cavalier was, she could not say! As for Fatty—there were, it would seem, two of her, and everyone was baffled by *that* combination!

But there were more mysteries to come! Halfway through the evening, when a very warm Carlisle was dancing with a rather warm Butterfly—the little masks seemed to shut out an enormous amount of air!—the former, after a wild twirl, felt the tarlatan rip upon her short, fluffy skirt.

"Oh, wait, Renée!" Regardless of the dancing couples who bumped into them, Carlisle stopped short, grasping her skirt with both hands. "If I move, the whole thing will rip—it's only basted! And it's started to go!"

Renée looked at her in perplexity. "What a shame! It'll take a long time to go 'way upstairs, too—and they may unmask while you're gone, so you'll miss the best part of the fun! Oh, Ca'lisle, why didn't you-all sew it on right! I told you it wouldn't hold that-a-way!" Renée, herself, had spent long, patient hours upon her costume, her floating draperies were marvels of tiny, minute stitches, even though the material upon which they had been placed was only cheesecloth. For Aunt Pinky had been very stern with the little girl. "A lady allus knows how to sew, honey, and sew good!" had been Aunt Pinky's maxim.

"I know!" wailed Carlisle, now, beneath her breath. "Why don't I ever do anything right! You haven't any pins you can spare, have you?"

Renée shook her head. "But there's Miss Luval,

sitting over there in front of the stage, Ca'lisle—maybe she can lend you a pin, and you can go up there on the stage, where it's dark, and pin up!"

"I'll need a whole paper of pins!" returned Carlisle, with a groan, making her way through the crowd, followed by the sympathetic Renée.

"Pins?" laughed Miss Luval, when the two girls reached her where she was sitting with her staff of teachers and Carlisle made known her predicament. "Certainly, Your Majesty!" And almost miraculously, she produced a paper of safety pins. She laughed at the girls' exclamations. "We've had parties here, before, my dears," she explained good-naturedly, "where crêpe paper and cheesecloth predominated!"

"It's almost as though I had waved my wand and made a wish for myself," said Carlisle gratefully, scampering toward the stage stairs.

Groping her way across the great, darkened space, for the curtain had been lowered to prevent sight of the piled-up desks and chairs at one side of the stage, Carlisle set to work upon repairs. But it was a hard task, for the folds of tarlatan were thick, and the pins would bend and twist and refuse to go through the designated places, and the poor Fairy Queen was sucking a badly pricked thumb when an odd draft upon her bare shoulders made her look up. The next instant she stifled a scream, for it seemed to her that the White Lady was standing near her, silhouetted in the exit Barbara had noticed that afternoon! The next instant after that, however, the vague, mysteri-

ous, white figure had moved, there was only the empty space of the open doorway, with a glimpse of snowy school yard outside, then not even that, for the door swung closed and darkness blotted out everything again. But Carlisle, standing motionless and breathless, distinctly heard a subdued giggle, heard footsteps stealing across the stage toward the stairs down into the study hall, and when silence settled down once more, knew she had been neither seen nor heard in turn.

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" she thought indignantly. "Someone in the school here certainly let in an outsider! Through that stage exit, there, behind those desks! What a sneaky thing to do!"

But when she had returned to the study hall, look around as she would, she could not discover any newcomer to the party. "Unless it's that person in the sheet and pillow case over there dancing with the Indian," she thought uncertainly. "But I'm sure I saw her before!" She suddenly laughed to herself. "What a little idiot I was to think I saw the White Lady!" she mused. "I'm as bad as Lily-Belle! It just shows what little foundation a scare like that really has!"

"What are you smiling at, Fairy Queen?" asked Miss Nancy, accepting the pins Carlisle returned with a murmur of thanks and looking up at the smiling, pretty mouth revealed as the girl lifted her mask for an instant.

Carlisle dropped her mask hastily. "Miss Nancy," she said earnestly, "does that sheet and pillow case

costume look to you as though it were hiding a—a—fat girl?" For the more she looked at that costume, the more convinced did she become that it hid Fatty! Of course—who else would come in a sheet and pillow case!"

Miss Nancy, though, only laughed and shook her head. "No fair!" she cried genially. But when Carlisle had moved away, she leaned over to her sister. "Alicia—that girl in the sheet and pillow case—it looks too tall and broad for Margaret Dale!" she whispered in a puzzled voice. "I'm sure, though, it's the sheet I let Kitty Evans borrow for her room mate!"

"Oh, well—Margaret may be wearing high-heeled slippers to disguise her lack of height—she's such a little thing, you know, Nancy. But I thought you said Carlisle borrowed a sheet and pillow case, too," she added quickly.

"Well, she did," returned Miss Nancy, with a worried frown. "Just now, though, when she returned the pins and lifted her mask for an instant to cool off, I was sure that that girl was Carlisle. That one in the Fairy Queen outfit."

"What does that prove?"

"Why, that she isn't the one in the sheet and pillow case."

"But she might have lent it to someone else."

"I don't think so." Miss Nancy shook her head, her troubled eyes upon the dancing Ghost. "For just now Carlisle—I'm sure the Fairy Queen *is* Carlisle—

asked me if I didn't think it was *Fatty* who was wearing the sheet."

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy, sometimes I think your girlhood lies farther behind you than mine does, though you are ten years younger!" laughed Miss Luval gently, tapping her sister upon the arm. "Girls are full of tricks, don't you know that? Carlisle has probably lent that sheet and pillow case to someone else—for that Ghost *is* too tall for Margaret Dale, and Kitty Evans doubtless scraped up another costume for her—and Carlisle knows perfectly well who is wearing it! So stop your worrying—I don't believe any girl is dishonorable enough to invite and admit an outsider—which I am perfectly aware is your suspicion! I wonder"—Miss Luval glanced down at her wrist watch—"if it isn't almost time for the girls to unmask, anyway? It's getting very warm here, and I should think they would all be melted beneath those masks."

"Why not ask them if they want to unmask now?" suggested Miss Nancy. "I doubt if they do—for they love this part of their party!"

"Well, I shall ask them, at any rate," replied her sister, rising decidedly.

"Why not put it to vote?" said Miss Frost, on the other side of Miss Luval.

"That's a good idea, Alicia!" cried Miss Nancy vivaciously. "And lots more fair, for some of the girls may be having piles of fun behind their masks."

"But it's almost time for refreshments," protested Miss Luval.

"Oh, what's the difference!" exclaimed Miss Nancy, with an impatient grimace. "They are not old stodgies who have to have everything just so! Let them keep their disguises for a little while longer—many of us would like to escape into their lovely world of make-believe for awhile and forget *our* troubles and cares!"

"You have so many, Nancy!" chided Miss Luval smilingly.

"Well, I have some!" retorted Miss Nancy, nodding toward the Ghost, at that moment dancing past, still engrossed in the Indian. "As, for instance, who in the world is wearing my borrowed sheet! Remember, I am responsible to Mrs. Lawtry for every sheet and pillow case mislaid!"

Meanwhile, so sure was Carlisle that Fatty was the Ghost, that when she brushed past her, she leaned over and tapped the other's arm. "I know you," she whispered mischievously. "You can't fool me!"

There was a little gasp from beneath the pillow case, another from the Indian, then both whirled away.

"Who was it?" asked Renée curiously, with whom Carlisle was dancing again.

"Why, Fatty, of course!"

"Fatty?" Renée craned her neck. "Why, I thought the taller one of those Turkish harem beauties was Fatty! But I do believe you are right, Ca'lisle! That Ghost has Fatty's broad shoulders and is about the same height. And she dances exactly like her—about as gracefully, I mean!" Renée giggled.

"But why should she stay with Kitty Evans all evening? I never knew she liked Kitty especially!" And Carlisle knit her brows.

"Is Kitty the Indian?" queried Renée. "I never thought so, eithah, Ca'lisle!"

Her room mate frowned. "Don't call me by name so loudly!" she said.

Renée apologized at once. "Of co'se—how stupid of me! I'm awfully sorry, Ca'lisle, honest——"

Carlisle groaned. "There, you did it *again!* Goodness, it's getting warmer and warmer in here! I'm glad I'm no Indian with that heavy blanket around me, or a Ghost with a pillow case over my head! I should think Fatty would be just about smothered!"

"She must be!" agreed Renée. "Oh, hush—Miss Luval is going to speak!"

Miss Luval's clear voice rose above the clamor as the orchestra stopped in obedience to her upraised hand. Silence, so in contrast to the bedlam of girlish voices, girlish laughter, as to be almost overwhelming, settled down over the place.

"I want to get your opinion, girls," announced Miss Luval smilingly, when only an occasional cough or the shuffling of feet marred the stillness. "Do you want to unmask before refreshments or afterwards?"

"Oh, before, don't you think?" observed Carlisle, blowing out the lower part of her mask. "How can we eat with these things on?"

Miss Luval, however, was greeted by varied answers. "Oh, before!" "No, afterward, afterward!" (Was that Kitty's high-pitched voice, shrill

with excitement?) "Before! Before!" "Aw, wait until afterward—spoil the fun to unmask now!"

Finally the principal held up her hand in laughing despair. "Wait, girls, wait!" she cried distractedly. "We shall have to put it to vote! Now, then, all in favor of aye line up on the eastern side of the study hall—all the negatives on this side!"

There was a steady shuffling of feet, a separation of the masked figures right and left. Then, to Carlisle's surprise and disgust—and it must be admitted to Miss Luval's surprise, also—the negatives had it.

"There, what'd I tell you, Alicia!" exulted Miss Nancy, from her chair behind her sister.

"Well, the negatives have it, sure enough!" announced Miss Luval, counting hastily again to make sure. "I don't see how some of you girls can stand it; but have it your way! We shall not unmask until after refreshments!" She raised her voice.

Amid jeers and catcalls from the girls who had been in favor of unmasking, the orchestra struck up the next dance number. Julie, dancing past Carlisle, tapped her upon the shoulder.

"Aren't you glad you're dressed as you are!" she said breathlessly. "I'm just about melted!"

"I should think Fatty would be *melted!*" flung back Carlisle, nodding toward the Ghost.

"Fatty?" Julie glanced over her shoulder; but her partner whirled her away, and Carlisle lost her answer, if she made any.

In vain Mr. Atterton, the janitor, opened window after window in the overheated study hall, closed

window after window. The crowd could not be suited, for as sure as the ventilation was one way, someone wanted it changed to another. At last he gave up the job in disgust and went down to his furnace room, where he sat in the dark and smoked his pipe and meditated grimly upon the capriciousness of womankind, young and old.

When Lily-Belle and her dusky, smiling-faced assistants appeared with paper napkins covered with red hearts, plates of heart-shaped sandwiches, plates of pink and white ice cream, there was a general scurry for the chairs lining the walls of the big room. As usual, there were not enough chairs to go around, for most of the day pupils had accepted Miss Luval's invitations to the party, too, so the stage steps were utilized. Carlisle noticed that the Ghost and the Indian even disappeared up on the stage with their plates of ice cream.

Holding the flap of her mask up with one hand as she laboriously poked spoonfuls of ice cream into her mouth beneath it, she mumbled, with a nod toward the disappearing figures, "Well, I can't understand *that!*"

Julie sauntered past. "Get that?" she nodded, also glancing toward the backs of the Ghost and the Indian. "Kitty Evans and Margaret Dale beating it off with loot! Honestly, they're the limit! You'd think after the other night, when they had to advertise to the world that they had eaten that whole box of candy because Kitty got the toothache, they'd be ashamed to do it again. I saw Margaret grab three or four

little cakes and about ten sandwiches! Kitty, too!"

"Margaret?" Carlisle stared up at Julie. "Isn't that Fatty wearing the sheet and pillow case?"

Julie shook her head. "Why, you know it isn't—but I forgot, you weren't there this afternoon," she replied. "I'll tell you later!" And she hurried off.

"Listen heah!" said Renée desperately at this point. "I'll unmask if you-all will! I can't eat this ice cream this-a-way!"

"You poor little martyrs!" laughed Miss Nancy, pausing before them to proffer more cake. "Is it so thrilling and intriguing to melt beneath those masks?"

"Indeed," Carlisle, selecting a heart-shaped cake, looked up at her protestingly, "I was on the affirmative side, Miss Nancy!"

"The thrill went out of this mask about an houah ago," chimed in Renée, also selecting a heart-shaped cake.

"I should think it would have—mercy, it's warm in here! I don't know why Mr. Atterton had to build such furnace fires to-night! But janitors are like that!" laughed Miss Nancy, motioning to Lily-Belle to approach with her trays of salted nuts and candies.

"Oh, I haven't seen these motto candies for ages!" exclaimed Carlisle interestedly, inspecting the handful she had taken. "Hear this!" she giggled. "'Ever thine!' And oh, here's a lovely one! 'Heart's Delight!' Isn't that what the Professor called Jo in *Little Women?*"

"Yes, and I always liked it, too. Heah's one," broke in Renée. "'Love's Feast!' Let's give this to

Kitty and Margaret!"

"What'd you draw in the mottoes?" asked Julie, returning to them for a moment. "I found a fine one for Kitty Evans and Margaret Dale—'Love's Feast!' " With a little laugh, she drifted off.

At last, as eleven o'clock neared, Miss Luval clapped her hands once more for silence. "The magic hour of unmasking has arrived!" she announced gayly. "Do so quickly, girls, and the orchestra will play one more dance number for you!"

Carlisle, with a sigh of relief, snatched off her spangled mask. "How wonderful to feel the air on your face!" she exclaimed. Suddenly she grabbed Renée by the arm, pointed excitedly.

"Why, it *was* Fatty, after all, in one of those Turkish harem costumes! Fatty and Helen Benedict! But who wore the Ghost costume, then?"

"Lawsy, don't ask me!" shrugged Renée. "Because there is Margaret Dale in that clown's rig, Ca'lisle! So Julie was wrong about her!"

Carlisle stood gazing eagerly at the crowd. "Want to dance?" asked Julie of Renée, coming up hastily. "It's the last one, Renée!"

"Suah! Get yo'self a partner, Ca'lisle!" exclaimed Renée, dancing off.

"Where's that Cavalier in the green cheesecloth?" Carlisle called after Renée. She peered in this direction and that. Renée was beyond hearing and did not answer. "Well, that's mighty funny!" mused Carlisle. "That's as queer as the Ghost's melting into thin air!"

For the Cavalier in green had disappeared, too!

CHAPTER XI

AN ACCUSATION

DESPITE her questions the next day, Carlisle could discover neither the identity of the Ghost nor of the Cavalier in green at first. Julie, whom she was positive knew the latter, would only laugh teasingly and shake her head when cornered.

"Far be it from me to tell you who the gentleman in green was, if 'he' didn't want his incognito known!" she giggled. And evading Carlisle's eager grasp, she was off down the corridor, grinning impishly over her shoulder.

"Fatty, do *you* know who the girl in green cheesecloth was?" demanded Carlisle, coming into the other's room that afternoon after school was over. "That Cavalier costume of green? Who wore it?"

Fatty, crying over Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop,* raised a pair of red-rimmed eyes and sniffed.

"I don't know why I always read this—it always 'gets' me!" she observed thickly, pushing the book away from her as she lay sprawled out on her chaise-longue. "The girl in green, Carlisle?" She knitted her brows. "Green dress?"

"No, green suit," replied Carlisle impatiently.

"You know—kind of a Gainsborough outfit—quite good-looking."

"There were several green outfits there," mused Fatty. Suddenly she looked up, an odd smile on her face. "Why, I lent Barbara Gainsworth a green suit and—yes, I guess it was s'posed to be a Cavalier costume! It was one that my sister Florence wore in a Junior League affair at home, and it was too tight for me." She grinned. "Don't tell me that you, of all people, got a 'crush' on the green Cavalier, my child!" she jeered. "I saw you dancing with her a lot!"

Carlisle's round chin lifted haughtily. "I don't get 'crushes'—they're silly," she snapped, stalking away.

But an instant later, as Fatty, in spite of her resolve, was reaching surreptitiously for her book, Carlisle was back again. "Listen, Fatty," she said earnestly, "who wore that sheet and pillow case last night, do you know?"

Fatty sat up on her chaise-longue and assumed an air of seriousness. "Now, that's a horse of a different color!" she retorted. "Mark my words, girl, there's going to be trouble about that!" She paused impressively. "Kitty Evans borrowed a sheet and pillow case from Miss Nancy ostensibly for Margaret Dale. But Margaret Dale appeared in a perfectly complete clown's costume, and I think that Margaret knew nothing about it!"

"Maybe Miss Nancy didn't notice that Margaret didn't wear that sheet and pillow case," said Carlisle thoughtfully.

"Miss Nancy is no dumbbell!" returned Fatty, in a scornful voice. "*Of course* she noticed it! You see, Carlisle—you just see!—there's going to be a fuss stirred up, because, in my opinion, Kitty Evans borrowed that costume for an outsider—the little sneak!"

"Fatty—I believe she did!" exclaimed Carlisle. She hastily related to the interested Fatty what she had seen and heard upon the darkened stage the previous evening. "Of course, I didn't actually *see* Kitty open the door, nor see her admit anyone, so I couldn't swear to it," she continued carefully. "But I certainly *thought* it was her giggle!"

"That proves it—that someone came in from outside!" said Fatty triumphantly. "Fine specimen of an honor girl! For of course it was Kitty! She's the only one foolish enough to do such a thing and think it was smart! Her silly maxim is—'All's fair in love, war, and at boarding school'!"

"It's too bad," said Carlisle warmly. "Mr. Evans is an awfully nice man. It will be a shame if Kitty doesn't make good here." She paused all at once, struck. Where was that fervent admiration of last summer, that hanging onto Margaret Dale's words, the eager attention paid to Kitty? Why, she could discuss and criticize coolly and calmly both of these girls, now! No longer were they objects of envy or girls to be copied! She tried to put this into words for Fatty's benefit.

"That often happens," said Fatty. "That's one of the fine things about going away to school—the new friends you make, the better perspective you get

on old ones! And speaking of new friends," she looked up at the other significantly, "you're missing a dandy chance, Carlisle."

"What do you mean?" asked Carlisle sharply.

"Why, Barbara Gainsworth's father is worth a couple of million or so, I've been told—not by Barbara, you may be sure! She could give you a mighty good time this summer if she took it into her head to invite you to New York," said Fatty, picking up her book with an air of elaborate indifference.

The cold silence that followed lasted until Fatty was forced to raise her eyes.

"See here, Fatty Smith," said Carlisle, then, in a steely voice, "do I look like that sort? Like an insufferable little beast who'd be nice to a girl for that reason?"

"No—o," admitted Fatty gloomily. "I must say you're no toady, Carlisle."

"Well, then!" And very square-shouldered, Carlisle turned and walked out of the room.

Fatty gazed after her with a dismayed frown. "A nice mess you've made of it, Susan Smith!" she ejaculated then. "Oh, dear, I remember, now, Julie told me not to tell anyone about Barbara's father! Oh, *land!*" And in deepest penitence, Fatty retired into her book, to weep more copiously than ever over the pathetic fortunes of Little Nell.

The first person, as luck would have it, that Carlisle met in the corridor outside Fatty's room was Barbara. Instantly, two slim, young figures stiffened, two young

faces grew stony and cold, two pairs of slender feet went along proudly, click! click! click!

When she had passed Carlisle, Barbara glanced down scornfully at her clenched hands, felt them to be nervously wet and clammy. "Fool! Fool!" she told herself furiously. "Why can't you hate her as she hates you!" She stopped beside a corridor window to stare out blindly over the school grounds. "But I don't hate her," she thought miserably. "Oh, Carlisle, why can't you like me—a little?"

Carlisle paused beside her own door at the sound of flying footsteps behind her. She turned in time to see Julie dashing up.

"Miss—Miss Luval wants you—in—in her office!" panted Julie. "Goodness, Carlisle, where—where have you been? I've been chasing—upstairs and downstairs for you!"

" 'Goosey, goosey gander, whither do ye wander, upstairs, downstairs——' " laughed Carlisle. "Thanks, anyway, for the message, even if it does sound ominous."

"Maybe Miss Luval wants to give you a medal," grinned Julie.

"More like a demerit, though I don't know what I've done, now!" returned Carlisle worriedly. "What? What did you say?" She glanced back over her shoulder as she hurried away.

"I said, come on back to Helen Benedict's room, after you get through!" called Julie. "We're planning something scrumptious!"

"All right," nodded Carlisle.

Running down the stairs and passing through the Old House, she thought impatiently, "I wonder why they don't put elevators in here? Or at least another flight of stairs!" But knocking upon Miss Luval's office door, no trace of irritation showed upon her face. Somehow, one did not often carry impatience into that room.

Somewhat to Carlisle's surprise, then, and it must be confessed to her discomfort, Miss Luval, upon her entrance, did not look up with her usual gracious smile. Instead, her sweet face wore a very troubled expression, and she motioned with a grave gesture, indeed, to the little, low, friendly chair beside her desk. She waited in total silence until Carlisle had seated herself. Then, looking the young girl straight in the face, she began to speak.

"Carlisle," she said, "a grave misdemeanor was committed last night in school. Someone invited and admitted to our dance, despite my ruling that no outsiders be admitted, a cadet from the military academy here in town. He wore"—Miss Luval paused—"he wore a sheet and pillow case over his uniform."

She paused again, as though waiting for Carlisle to speak. But the girl kept silent. What, give away Kitty Evans, sneak though she was! That, Carlisle told herself steadily, was not the fair, square, sporting thing to do, even though Kitty's own ideas of honor fell far short of the school ideals! So she maintained a silence that looked wretchedly like stubborness to poor Miss Luval.

"There were," continued that lady sadly, "two

sheets and two pillow cases borrowed from Miss Nancy yesterday, by you and by Kitty Evans. You have worked hard to acquire the standing required to be an honor girl next term, Carlisle. But now, since you are under suspicion—and will be until you can clear yourself—you must have any privileges withheld from you which you might otherwise enjoy. I am sorry!" She stopped. But again Carlisle did not speak. "I am sorry, Carlisle," she repeated gently. "But you understand that, until you can prove that you were not the girl who invited that cadet to the masquerade, you must remain under your present rating!"

"My sheet and pillow case were not used," said Carlisle stiffly, at last. "They have been lying folded upon a chair in my room ever since I borrowed them from Miss Nancy."

Miss Luval looked at her sorrowfully. "I am sorry to tell you that your sheet and pillow case *were* used," she answered sternly. "Miss Nancy went to your room this noon for them and found them not only muddy, but torn!"

Carlisle stared at her. "But I—I—did not put them—that is—why, they've been lying folded—yesterday afternoon I pu-put them there on that chair!" she stammered incoherently.

Miss Luval shook her head. "Carlisle," she said, in that stern, cold voice which sounded so strange in her pupil's ears, "I shall be glad to hear anything when you have anything to say. Meanwhile, I must repeat, both you and Kitty Evans have disappointed

me more than I can tell you." And somehow Carlisle found herself dismissed and out in the corridor.

Five minutes later the girls gathered together in Helen Benedict's room glanced up in amazement at the white-faced, stormy-eyed girl who flung herself through the door.

"Ca'lisle, fo' mercy's sake, what is the mattah?" gasped Renée, jumping to her feet in alarm.

Carlisle could only shake her head, afraid that if she did speak, she would only burst into miserable, babyish tears. It was Fatty who, with a keen glance at her shaking hands and trembling lips, drew her over to a chair by the window.

"Here, sit down here, Carlisle!" said Fatty. She turned to the others who, staring, exclaiming, were crowding around Carlisle. "Leave her alone!" commanded Fatty heavily. "Here, come on back to the other end of the room and give her a chance!" And she led the way back to Helen's bed and flopped down upon it herself.

Carlisle stared out over the snowy landscape, as blindly as Barbara had previously done. But gradually the friendliness and the sympathy of the other girls reached her, even though they were careful not to glance in her direction, and at last she tentatively cleared her throat, a sound that brought both Renée and Fatty to her side.

"Fatty," said Carlisle tremulously, looking up into Fatty's concerned face, "I—I—have been accused by Miss Luval of having invited and admitted to the dance last night one of the military cadets!"

Renée uttered a shocked exclamation. It was Fatty who shook her head.

"But that's absurd, Carlisle," she answered. "You know who we agreed, this afternoon, was the one."

Helen Benedict spoke in her sensible fashion. "What were Miss Luval's proofs?" she asked quietly.

"The fact that I had borrowed a sheet and pillow case, which were used by that—that boy. And the fact that the sheet, muddy and torn, was found upon a chair in my room this morning by Miss Nancy. Renée," she turned to her room mate, "don't you remember seeing that sheet all folded and neat upon the chair yesterday afternoon and this morning when we left the room? Someone must have substituted the other for it, before Miss Nancy came in!"

Renée, however, shook her head miserably. "I remember hearing you say you were going to borrow one, Ca'lisle," she said slowly. "But honestly, in the excitement of getting dressed for that masquerade, I never even noticed whether or not the chair was in our room, let alone a sheet upon it!"

"You noticed whether or not you danced a lot with me, didn't you?" demanded Carlisle sharply. "Did I disappear——" She stopped suddenly, saw the same thought which had crossed her mind reflected in Renée's eyes. "But I did disappear," she said slowly. "I went up on the stage to pin my torn skirt!"

"Well, my goodness, you told me about that!" said Fatty forcibly. "I guess I can repeat that, if necessary!"

"That doesn't prove anything—what I told you!"

said Carlisle wearily. "It's what you *see* that proves anything. And Renée, here, actually saw me go up toward that stage exit—the only door which could have been used by that cadet to get into the dance unnoticed—and she will have to tell Miss Luval exactly that if she is asked."

"Just the same," declared Renée, suddenly flinging her thin, little arm around Carlisle's neck, "I know you didn't invite anyone, I don't care if everybody in the world tries to prove it to me!"

There was a general chorus, and Carlisle looked at them gratefully. Then Helen spoke, with keen eyes upon Fatty's face.

"From what you said, a little while ago, I gather that you and Carlisle, here, know the girl who *did* invite that cadet," she surmised shrewdly.

Carlisle's eyes met Fatty's.

"If you know this person—who was betraying the school honor—then I think you are justified in telling who she is!" said Helen slowly.

"Oh, Helen, two wrongs don't make a right," said one of the girls impatiently. "Of course Carlisle couldn't tattle!"

"Even if I could prove it—I don't think I would," said Carlisle.

"Shows your decency," commented Renée, glancing resentfully at Helen, who merely smiled. Somehow, the latter's good-nature and practicality formed an armor against which the little world of Harwood Hall might hammer in vain. Now, she went quietly toward her desk, and, taking out a large box of chocolates,

passed it amiably around. Coming to Renée, she held it out to her with such an impersonal, kindly smile that the other girl, after a little hesitation, helped herself and smiled back.

"I shouldn't—but I will!" said Fatty, when the box reached her. And they all laughed. There was a little silence, which Fatty, after chewing thoughtfully upon her caramel, finally broke. "See here," she cried, jumping to her feet, "maybe you can't go down there and tattle, Carlisle; but I, as an innocent bystander, can relate what I've seen and heard. Where is Julie?" She looked around the room.

"Julie said she'd be in later," answered one of the girls. "She's cramming for that English exam to-morrow."

"Well, I'm going down and have a little talk with Miss Luval," repeated Fatty sturdily.

"It won't do any good, Fatty," murmured Carlisle, in a discouraged voice.

"I don't care!" Fatty shook her head recklessly. "There's nothing to lose by it, and something might be gained!"

Twenty minutes later, however, she was back. The angry tramp of her feet could be heard coming up the stairs even before she was seen.

"Well?" demanded Renée breathlessly.

Fatty waved her hands. "I'm so mad!" she gasped. "I'm so mad I could go out and eat a tree!"

"But what *happened?*" Renée fairly danced up and down.

"Here's what happened," said Fatty, in a grim

voice. "I got Miss Nancy, and she went in with me to Miss Luval's office. It was all hunky-dory! Yes, Kitty had also borrowed a sheet and pillow case—though the one *she* returned this morning was immaculate and unused. Still, I insisted that the sheet could have been exchanged, as long as Carlisle said she had left her sheet, unused and immaculate, upon the chair by the door in her room. So—Miss Luval sent for Kitty!" Fatty rolled her eyes around the group of tense faces. "And Kitty absolutely swore up and down she did *not* use the sheet and pillow case! Not only swore it," said Fatty, with a grim gesture, "but proved by Margaret Dale that that sheet had lain unused upon her bed all last evening—Margaret having decided to wear the clown's suit, after all, that she wore last year! You see," finished Fatty, "she had the brains to have *her* witness all primed and ready! I should say that Mr. Evans was a smart man!"

"He is," responded Carlisle sharply. "But he is honest!" She sank into a brief reverie. "Well, anyway, you are a peach, Fatty, for trying to help me out of this scrape!" she said gratefully.

"You're welcome, Carlisle—not that I helped you any!" replied Fatty, staring so fixedly at the candy box that Helen finally got up and laughingly passed it around again. "Ah, thanks, Helen, my friend—I do feel in the need of sustenance after that ordeal!"

"The whole miserable thing—or, at least, my part in it—was caused by my vanity!" sighed Carlisle. "If I hadn't worried so over that cut on my cheek I never

would have thought of borrowing a sheet and pillow case, to hide it, from Miss Nancy! Or if," she frowned, "that horrid little Mary Fillmore hadn't gotten in the way that day, the rest of this would not have happened!"

Renée laughed. "You might as well say," she observed, getting up and stretching, "that if it hadn't snowed day before yesterday, the ground wouldn't be covered with snow now! Come on, Ca'lisle, you're gettin' woozy with all youah troubles!" And, smilingly, she tugged at the other's arm.

But Helen interrupted. "Wait, Renée—what've we decided about that candy pull next Monday? Will you ask Aunt Lide—see if she's willing for us to go out in her precious kitchen? And then ask Miss Luval?"

"Why me?" inquired Renée in protest. "Why not some of you-all?"

"Don't be so vain!" exclaimed Fatty. "You know that you want us to tell you that Aunt Lide thinks you're perfect, more or less, and that Miss Luval, for some mysterious reason, is equally fond of you and more liable to grant you favors than to some of the rest of us!"

Renée's dark, sensitive face flushed. "Now, Fatty," she began, in a hurt voice. But Fatty's arms were around her at once.

"You silly little nut, can't you take a joke? If I had thought that, would I have said it?" demanded Fatty.

Carlisle looked around her with new interest in her

eyes when Renée departed. At her age, though troubles are real, they are rather apt to be temporary.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Taffy pull!" said Fatty, pantomiming elaborately.

Carlisle watched her speculatively, for a moment or so. Then she began to laugh. "Oh, Fatty, stop!" she put out a protesting hand. "No one in the world could tell whether you were demonstrating a new vacuum cleaner or leading a class in calisthenics!"

"Well, I like that!" Fatty stopped in the act of pulling out a large gob of sticky, if imaginary, candy and looked around indignantly at the grinning faces watching her. "Why, I've been told I could make my fortune on the stage!"

"How?" asked Carlisle cruelly. "By being a lady heavyweight? Or a good, strong scene shifter and stage hand?"

Whereupon developed, of course, a hit-and-dodge species of running fighting, during which poor orderly Helen's room began to look as though a tornado had struck it, and her plump, comfortable cushions began to fly through the air like fat, silent hens. One of them caught Renée fairly on the nose when she reëntered a little later, so that she staggered and reeled against the door casing.

"For Pete's sake, I thought that pillow was going the other way!" exclaimed the surprised girl who had thrown it. "I'm terribly sorry, Renée—it hurt you?" She ran over to her victim.

"Just about broke my nose, that's all, Dot!" mumbled poor Renée in a muffled tone, as she covered the

injured member with both hands for a moment, then looked down at them in terrified suspicion of gore.

Dorothy Stockton laughed. "You're all right—no nose-bleed!" she said cheerfully. "What'd they say?"

"Who?" mumbled Renée. "It *is* going to bleed—it feels just like it!—What'd who say?"

"Aunt Lide! Miss Luval!" interrupted Fatty, puffing as she bent to pick up scattered pillows.

"Yes, what'd they say?" echoed Carlisle. She came up and pulled Renee's hands from her face. "Here, let me feel your nose, child! It's all right!" She rubbed it tenderly between thumb and forefinger. "The pillow was soft!"

"Well, I only hope it won't be crooked all the rest of its life!" said Renée gloomily, looking cross-eyed at her nose. "Both said yes!" she added, grinning, then. "But *I* get the candy pan to scrape—and all the spoons to lick! Aunt Lide promised me!"

CHAPTER XII

THE WHITE LADY

THE taffy pull was a great success. At least, the participants said so, and envious "left-outers" jeered and scoffed in vain; nothing could daunt the complacency of the first named nor deny the existence of plates containing large pieces of scissored taffy which, when brought into steam-heated rooms from outside windowsills, turned into great masses of sticky yellow substance almost impossible to eat.

Then life at Harwood Hall settled into a steady routine of lessons, unexciting periods of recreation, and equally unexciting twice-a-day walks, when a long line of girls, headed by a shivering teacher, would march demurely down the hill, circle around four or five blocks, and march back again. To Carlisle, who had hoped to escape them and who had really worked exceedingly hard to become an honor girl, these walks out in line were well-nigh intolerable. But she bore them with fairly good grace, while the sympathy of her intimates, and their scorn toward the thick-skinned Kitty, who only laughed and tossed her head, helped not a little.

At last Lent, with its girlish sacrifices and forced penitences, arrived to break the monotony. It came

quite early that year, and was marked by the appearance at the luncheon table of huge Shrove Tuesday pancakes, with exciting forecasts of future events in them in the shape of a wedding ring and a sixpence and a thimble, as well as a tiny pen and funny little dolls. It was Fatty, placidly chewing upon a bite of her pancake, who discovered the first article, suddenly clamping her teeth down upon something hard. She removed from her mouth, with the most surprised expression in the world, which changed to comical indignation, the thimble that indicated her future spinsterhood. Soon after that Kitty Evans, prodding her pancake cannily with her fork, discovered the wedding ring and put it, with a triumphant air, upon her left hand.

The pen went to Helen Benedict, whose themes in English were the bane of her teacher's life, for a more unimaginative girl was hardly to be found, while little Mary Fillmore, invited, among the other day pupils, to luncheon that day to share in the fun, found three of the five white china dollies in her pancake and almost fled her table, overcome with crimson embarrassment.

Some of the girls gave up sweets for Lent; some, to earn money for their little charity boxes, offered to do bed making at so much a week—for part of the domestic science course consisted of the care of their own rooms by the pupils, except for the cleaning—and businesslike signs appeared upon different doors, "Hats retrimmed for 50c," "Manicuring, 25c"; "Shampooing, 35c"; "Hairbrushes and combs washed,

10c each"; "Stockings darned, 10c pair, small holes; 15c up, large holes." Carlisle, meditating deeply, decided to make shoe polishing her mode of fund raising, and later was seen at spasmodic intervals with huge armfuls of shoes and slippers that she had collected. Her only failing was that she had no system about ownership, became utterly confused as to which slippers belonged to which girl, and was apt to be visited by irate owners demanding their rightful property. Renée, Julie, and Barbara, turning over their entire allowances, flatly refused to do anything else for charity.

"Shampoos!" Renée's tone was horrified when Carlisle, looking as though she were about to make her appearance in some minstrel show from the shoe-blacking upon hands, face, and smock, looked up over an enormous amount of footgear by which she was surrounded in their room, to suggest that Renée should do shampooing. "Why, I wouldn't touch anyone's haid for any amount of filthy lucre—I'd rathah scrub floors! Ugh!"

"You're too finicky, young woman!" observed Carlisle, the tip of her tongue going around and around as she polished away industriously upon a class mate's slipper. "My goodness, what'd you do if you were a poor widow with seven children! I guess you'd have to do a little shampooing then, once in awhile!"

"I nevah shall be a po' widow with seven children," answered Renée, with dignity, "so what's the use of you-all supposing any such silly truck, Ca'lisle, as that? Put yo' tongue in. You make me nervous!"

"I can't work unless I stick out my tongue," said Carlisle amiably, doing as she had been bidden, nevertheless. "Say, listen, Renée," she continued after a short pause, during which Renée frowned as she conjugated a French verb and Carlisle mopped up some of the shoe dressing she had just spilled, "that White Lady's been seen again! Did you know that?"

"Oh, lawsy, has she?" Renée's feet thumped to the floor in startled fashion as she sat up to stare at Carlisle with widened gaze. "Who told you-all, Ca'lisle?"

"The most sensible person in the school," answered Carlisle calmly, holding up the slipper she was polishing to inspect it fondly. "Fatty told me!"

"Fatty! She told us that wild tale befo', though, Ca'lisle, about the groans—and Julie came along and spoiled it!" Renée tried to laugh carelessly; but her glance around the low-ceilinged room, out of whose corners the shadows were beginning to creep, was one full of distaste. "Sometimes I just hate this room—it's so old and dingy! I don't like this old paht of the house anyway—you almost think you see the White Lady any night! I wish we could exchange our room for one in the South Wing—they are so new and modern! What did Fatty say? Do go on, Ca'lisle!"

"Go on?" Carlisle laughed, glanced up mischievously as she tossed the finished slipper into a pile upon her right and took up another one. "Nothing much to tell, Renée, and, anyway, what's the use when it only gets you all stirred up?"

"Ca'lisle Mahtin, you make me so mad sometimes!"

Renée looked at the other crossly. "What'd you-all staht to tell me if you didn't calculate to finish? Go on, or I'll get a wash cloth"—her tone became threatening—"a real, cold, wet one—and squeeze it drop by drop down yo' back!"

"If you do, I'll blacken your little face for you!" threatened Carlisle in return, waving a dripping sponge.

Renée, at that, dropped into pleading. "Aw, Ca'lisle, don't be so mean! Tell me what Fatty said about the White Lady!"

Carlisle laughed at this sudden change from defiance to cajolery, but she complied. "Why, she was up with the toothache last night—that taffy gave her a whopping one!—and returning from the Infirmary, where Miss Cameron gave her some oil of cloves—she passed the door to that old, unused room. The one the servants call 'Miss Melissa's room'—I wonder what the story of that room is, by the way—and if 'Miss Melissa' was the White Lady? Well, she was passing that door, Renée, when she saw——" Carlisle's voice died away impressively.

"What?" whispered Renée, staring at her room mate with dilated eyes.

Carlisle's voice dropped to ghastly depths. "A white figure floating along ahead of her!" whispered back Carlisle. "Which, as she looked at it—*disappeared!*" Here, Carlisle's voice rose to the proper hair-raising screech.

Renée, however, instead of laughing as the other had expected her to do, and as Carlisle herself did,

gave a sudden gasp and fell back in her chair, looking so white and strange that her room mate scrambled to her feet.

"Why, Renée!" she cried remorsefully, stumbling over the pile of shoes toward her. "I was only fooling! Here"—distractedly, as Renée kept on panting, with her hands against her heart and looking very queer indeed—"let me get you a drink of water!" Carlisle dashed behind the screen that hid the stationary bowl from the rest of the room. "Drink this!" she commanded, reappearing and in her agitation spilling more than half of the contents of the tumbler she was carrying. "Goodness, you *are* nervous, aren't you!"

Renée grasped the tumbler with both hands; but her teeth clicked such a sharp rat-a-tat against the tumbler's edge that Carlisle took it gently from her and held it for her. And after a little while, Renée could look up to smile sheepishly, with the color creeping back a little into her pale face.

"Well!" exclaimed Carlisle emphatically. "That's the last time you get me to tell you a ghost story, young lady! All right, now?"

Renée nodded. "I don't know what was the mattah with me!" she confessed. "Guess it's just Aunt Pinky's believing in these things—I remembah all the old stories she used to tell me on the sly, when Grandfathah wouldn't know it—and they all come a-floodin' back to make your story more real! I don't want to believe in that old White Lady—but, somehow, I do!"

"That's being silly and ridiculous," scolded Car-

lisle, going back to her task. "You know right well—as well as I do, Renée—that that story is just servants' talk. And what Fatty actually saw last night was something created by her own imagination—probably a broom left in a corner, with a towel upon doorknob beside it, by one of the maids!"

"Don't tell me I'm ridiculous, Ca'lisle! Don't I know it!" exclaimed Renée. She moved restlessly. "Do get finished with those old shoes! And let's light the light—these shadows in this old room give me the willies!"

Obediently, with a keen glance at the other, Carlisle got up and turned on the lights, and conversation went on in the little, low-ceilinged room. But somehow, by mutual consent, the story of the White Lady was dropped.

It was Fatty, half an hour later, bouncing into the room waving two small-sized slippers very indignantly and retrieving her number sevens from the pile beside Carlisle, who reopened the subject. She got no further, however, than "Did I tell you——" when she was stopped by violent gestures from Carlisle. Renée, peeping from behind the screen, where she was dressing for dinner, laughed rather hysterically.

"Don't mind me, Ca'lisle!" she exclaimed. "I'm all right, now!"

"What's the matter?" asked the open-mouthed Fatty. She gazed anxiously at Carlisle. "Not going to have a fit or something, are you?"

"No, I'm not—they don't run in our family!" returned Carlisle, composedly picking up her last

unpolished slipper. "But I thought Renée was going to have one a little while ago when I foolishly tried to scare her with your horrid old White Lady ghost story. My goodness, I thought she was going to faint! It's the last time I ever try to be dramatic with a nervous audience!"

Fatty transferred her stare to Renée, at that moment shamefacedly retiring behind the screen with a reproachful, "Now, Ca'lisle, I thought you-all wouldn't tell on me like that!"

"Well, I didn't know but what we'd better have Miss Cameron look you over," explained Carlisle, glancing at Fatty, who nodded approval. Renée, however, was so decided in her refusal that her room mate gave a shrug. She threw the finished slipper beside its mate and stretched her cramped muscles. "Mercy!" she yawned. "I don't know why I ever started this! And to think Lent lasts three more weeks!"

"You must be earning an awful lot of money, though," said Fatty, gazing rather enviously at the big pile of shoes beside the other. "I've only had one customer so far for shampooing."

"It's too bad it's so easy for everyone to shampoo her own bobbed head," grinned Carlisle. "But then, Fatty, I have to polish three and a half pairs of shoes to make as much as you do shampooing one person. And then, of course," she pointed out, "there is always the chance of being tipped in a hairdressing establishment."

"Huh, fine chance of a tip in *this* place!" grunted

Fatty sarcastically. "Why, my one customer even tried to beat me down in my price!"

"Trouble is, Fatty," said Carlisle thoughtfully, "there are so many hairdressers in this school. I counted at least six 'shampoo signs' on this one floor last night!"

"I know," sighed poor Fatty, in a tone of utter discouragement, "all the dumbbells try to earn their charity money that way—they can't think of any other way!"

"And you wanted me to do shampooing!" said Renée in laughing reproach, struggling into a dainty white silk dress. "All the dumbbells try to earn money that way, eh!"

"I didn't mean——" began Carlisle hastily. Then she caught sight of Renée's teasing glance from behind the screen and grinned. "Aw, gwan wid ye!" she said lazily. "Trying to get *me* into a tight corner! I meant nothin', nohow, nowhere—try and make a lawsuit out of that, if you can!"

"Where's the bridegroom?" asked Fatty curiously, staring at Renée's white dress.

Renée glanced down at her gown and laughed. "It isn't as bridey as all that, is it? You've seen it a million times, more or less, anyway, Fatty—why rave about it at this late date?" she retorted. "Anyway, it's Saturday night—you always feel like dressing up a little!"

"I don't," commenced Fatty, when the sound of a gong brought both her and Carlisle to their feet with horrified exclamations. "Golly-gosh!" went on Fatty,

with a wild glance at her wrist watch. "Here's where I get a demerit all right—Miss Luval said no more tardiness to meals could be condoned! Saturday afternoons are always like this—you think you have so much time, then all of a sudden, you haven't!" And the slam of the door was like an exclamation mark behind her.

Renée good-naturedly helping her room mate, they were soon ready to go downstairs. But poor Fatty hailed them mournfully as they hurried past her room.

"Would you wear a dress with a rip in it or one with a spot down the front?" she inquired of them anxiously when they stopped to poke their heads in at her door.

"Spot or rip?" Renée considered the two dresses lying side by side upon Fatty's bed with her head on one side. "Oh—spot, I think, Fatty—don't you, Ca'lisle?—because you can hide it gracefully by clasping your hands coyly in front of you-all."

"Wouldn't you think Fatty would have sewed that rip during 'Rec' this afternoon?" murmured Carlisle, when they were hurrying toward the stairs again.

"Poor Fatty—she's the laziest thing when it comes to her own affairs!" laughed Renée affectionately. "But she'll work her fingers to the bone for her friends!"

Suddenly she stopped, clutched at the stair rail, while her face paled.

"What's the matter?" asked Carlisle anxiously, snatching at Renée's elbow.

Renée shook her head. "I—don't know," she

murmured. "Queer—feelin' here!" And her hands clutched at her heart again.

"Well," said Carlisle matter-of-factly, although her own heart gave a thump of fear, "let's take it a little more slowly, old girl! You—never had any doctor tell you you had heart trouble, did you, Renée?"

The other shook her head. "Grandfathah used up all of the doctahs," she said, half-smiling. "No one ever looked at me! I just 'growed'—like Topsy."

They were slowly rounding the second floor banisters when another figure slipped in ahead of them from that floor—a figure who, at sight of them, assumed an air of guilty haste. Carlisle's face crimsoned and her lips tightened.

"There goes the champion sneak!" she muttered to Renée beneath her breath.

"Who? Kitty Evans? Don't you-all care, Ca'lisle—she's bound to get hers—that kind always does!" consoled Renée. "Though I do think it's mighty unfair for you to have to bear the blame for her foolishness! Miss Luval evah say anything more about the masquerade affair?"

Carlisle shook her head. "I'd give a good deal to know who changed those sheets on the chair in our room," she replied gloomily. "Though it really could have been only one person, of course."

Fatty, trailing down a little later, hastily patting brown hair into place and adjusting her wearing apparel as she went, paused at the dining-room door for a dreadful instant. It was true—everyone was seated, was unfolding her napkin. But Miss Frost

smiled at Fatty from the head of her table, and the stout girl relievedly hurried in, one eye upon her principal's table as she scuttled to her seat.

"Ah knew you-all would be right down, Miss Smiff, so Ah left youah soup a-settin'," whispered Lily-Belle, who adored Fatty.

"That's good," answered Fatty absently. She took a spoonful of the cold soup. "Gosh, it's not very hot, is it!" she added, making a face. "But I guess it's better than drawing attention to my late arrival by bringing it in from the kitchen, at that," she finished resignedly.

Lily-Belle's face, which had become anxious as she hovered over her favorite, cleared. "That's what Ah thought, Miss Smiff," she replied.

"Say, listen, Lily-Belle, seen the White Lady recently?" asked Fatty teasingly over her shoulder.

Lily-Belle's eyes rolled. "Says which, Miss Smiff?" she inquired fearfully.

"I saw her—last night," continued Fatty, with a serious face belied by her twinkling eyes.

"Oh, mah bones!" And Lily-Belle disappeared kitchenwards.

"You're a meanie," said Helen Benedict, on Fatty's left. "What do you want to scare the poor little 'cullud puhson' that way for?"

"Only wanted to punish her for lying," said Fatty calmly. "She tried to make me believe just now that only her concern about drawing attention to my tardiness at the dinner table kept her from carrying my

soup back to the kitchen for reheating, when it was really only her laziness. She needed punishing."

"What was that you were telling her about having seen the White Lady last night?" asked Helen inquisitively.

Fatty glanced up from her plate. "Ha, curiosity killed a cat!"

"I'm not a cat. Go on!" retorted Helen composedly. "What's the tale?"

"Tale! Tail! Speaking of cats!" groaned Fatty. "Yes, Miss Frost?"

"It's Saturday night, Susan,—and late arrivals are condoned more than on other nights," said Miss Frost tolerantly, smiling at Fatty. "*But* they mustn't be too gay! So a little more quiet at our table is requested."

"Yes'm," answered Fatty meekly. "Why, honestly, I *did* see something last night," she went on in a low tone, turning back to Helen. "Had me scared, all right!"

Helen buttered some bread. "What'd 'it' look like?" she asked.

Fatty made a vague gesture. "Oh, I can't describe it—sorta white and—and—cloudy-looking in the moonlight."

"Now, I know you're telling a fairy tale!" scoffed Helen. "There wasn't any moon last night!"

"There was, too!" contradicted Fatty indignantly. "I saw it!" She turned to Miss Frost. "Wasn't there a moon last night?" she demanded.

The teacher looked doubtful. "There may have

been a moon, but was there moonlight?" she questioned in return. "I don't think so, Susan. It was cloudy when I went to bed."

"Well, there's moonlight to-night, isn't there?" demanded Fatty.

Helen nodded, her eyes upon a window. "I grant you that, Fatty! But, really, my child, I think you were dreaming about that episode last night!"

Fatty cast a despairing look ceilingward. "And yet you got the pen! Heaven help the poor literary public in the future! Can't you *imagine* a little moonlight to help me out?" And she settled into a dejected silence out of which neither Helen's teasing nor her questions could rouse her.

It was Carlisle, at the next table, who, a little later on at dinner, discovered Renée's absence.

"Why, where is she?" she asked her neighbor, in a startled voice. "Where's Renée, Blair?"

Blair Milton, a pretty, fair-haired girl with a gentle face, glanced at the empty chair opposite them. "Didn't you see her get up and leave?" she returned, surprised. "She spoke to Miss Atkinson and then left."

"That's odd! No, I didn't see her go—I must have been talking to Milly about that last movie of Gail Austin's—arguing about it, you know." Carlisle raised her voice. "Miss Atkinson, did Renée say she felt ill?"

The gym teacher, who sat at the head of the table, shook her head. "Not ill, Carlisle—just not well. I told her to go up to the morning room and lie down

on the couch, there, for a little while, then come back if she felt better."

Carlisle looked thoughtful. "Renée had a strange spell—oh, not a spell, exactly, but she felt sort of queer on the way down to dinner," she told the teacher dubiously. "Maybe I'd better take a run upstairs and be sure she is all right?"

"If you wish to do so, Carlisle," Miss Atkinson said cordially, "go, by all means."

So Carlisle left the clatter and the gayety of the big school dining room and went out into the quiet corridor. But Renée, when she had climbed the stairs to it, was not in the morning room.

"Maybe she went on up to the Infirmary," Carlisle told herself, her heart commencing to beat a little faster. "Although why she'd go up there when Miss Cameron was down in the dining room is beyond me. However, perhaps she thought she could find some spirits of ammonia, if she felt faint!"

Turning to her right and passing through the Old House, Carlisle took the staircase which led up through that part. Here not a sound from the dining room, in the newer wing, penetrated. All was quiet and dark and—yes, it must be admitted, to Carlisle, rather spooky! The doors of some of the rooms were open, and these open spaces threw bright silver squares upon the corridor floor from the moonlight streaming in through bedroom windows beyond. Carlisle found herself instinctively tiptoeing along—the sound of her own heels rather frightened her.

She tried not to think of the White Lady, of course;

but, somehow, that was all she *could* think of! Although she told herself fiercely she did not believe in that silly stuff! Past the old trunk room, past Miss Dempsey's room—Miss Dempsey was the Latin teacher, and although not quite as old and as stern as Mrs. Lawtry, still there was something brown and shriveled and dried-up about her that made one know she'd choose a sloping-roofed bedroom in the Old House in preference to the newer, modern quarters of the other wings—past her room—and, thank goodness, her door was closed!—then on down the corridor toward the Infirmary!

By this time, Carlisle's breath was coming quite quickly. Only her concern and real affection for her little room mate prevented her from turning back to the laughter and happy noise of the dining room. But she made herself go on. And now there was but one more door to pass—the open one into "Miss Melissa's room"!

Carlisle tried to march past without glancing into it. She knew how it would look in the moonlight—the big canopied bed, the old walnut furniture, the floral rug whose pattern would stand out so distinctly. It was used, now, for an extra guest room, and before the foolish tale of the White Lady Carlisle had rather admired it—it was so different from the modern furniture of her little Mid-West town. But now, its atmosphere was no longer charming—every one of the girls had got in the habit of hurrying past it, and one pupil, discovering that her mother was to be given that room—because another mother, due to visit the school

at the same time, had been apportioned the regular guest room downstairs—had even written a frantic and incoherent letter home, trying to explain that this was a very poor time of the year to visit Stuart at all. She had succeeded, her mother writing back that she would come down later when it was more springlike.

"Ruth Hazard, you're too *silly!*" Carlisle had told her contemptuously when the girl had announced how she had headed off her mother. "Goodness, I'd take the risk of my mother being visited by the White Lady in 'Miss Melissa's room', all right, if she could only come!"

"Yes, but would you?" Ruth Hazard had retorted. "When it came right down to it, you wouldn't want your mother scared, either, Carlisle Martin!"

"But there wouldn't anything occur to scare your mother!" Carlisle had insisted. "That's only servant's talk!"

"How do you know?" Ruth had questioned darkly.

And how did she know! Now, here, actually opposite the door itself, Carlisle could smile bitterly at herself. How did she know? Perhaps there was foundation for the story, after all! People really didn't know!

And now she was at the door to "Miss Melissa's room" itself! And she *had* glanced in! Whose breath was that, coming in a quick, terrified gasp! Why, it was her own! And it was her own feet that couldn't seem to move for an instant, and her own hands that were icy cold and all clammy wet! For

there, on the floor of "Miss Melissa's room," lying prone, *was the White Lady!*

Or was it? Staring horrifiedly, still not able to move from sheer fright, Carlisle's mind seemed to be working outside her body. "That's not the White Lady! Don't be stupid and absurd, Carlisle! Go and find out!" Carlisle shook her head. "Oh, I can!t I can't!" she moaned. But even as she moaned this, her sensible feet carried her forward into the room instead of stampeding wildly downstairs, as she really wished them to do, and she found herself quite close to that white figure lying outstretched in the moonlight!

The next instant she gasped again, though it was a different sort from the first gasp—no longer terrified, only concerned. For the white figure was Renée, in her white silk dress and with her poor little face as colorless as her dress!

"Renée! Renée!" Carlisle knelt beside her, trying to rouse her. Then she got up and looked around for a glass of water. This time she never even thought of the possibility of anyone lurking behind the screen that hid the wash stand—she just ran to turn on a faucet, to obtain the tumblerful of water. But to her surprise and fright, Renée did not move when she splashed some of it in her face, did not wince at all when, with frantic haste, she dashed the rest of it upon her. "Oh, my!" said Carlisle, stumbling to her feet. "Oh, my goodness—she's—she's——" But she couldn't finish that terrible thought.

Flying down the three flights of stairs to the dining

room, she hurried to Miss Cameron's side, unaware of the amazed glances cast at her as she ran across the long room.

"Renée fainted!" Instantly, Miss Cameron was upon her feet, was following Carlisle back upstairs. "Better get some spirits of ammonia," she told Miss Nancy who, somehow, was with them. Miss Luval was also not far behind. How comforting it was to have three companions up those lonely flights of stairs through the Old House, thought Carlisle, running ahead! She was the first to reach Renée, and there she was, just as white and as still as when Carlisle had left her!

"How scared she'd be if she knew where she was!" thought the latter, watching Miss Cameron kneel to feel Renée's pulse.

Miss Nancy came in with the spirits of ammonia, and they picked up the slender shoulders and forced some of the liquid between Renée's lips. There was a knock on the door casing outside, then, and there stood Mr. Atterton, breathing as though he, too, had hurried upstairs.

"You sent for me, Miss Luval?" he said inquiringly.

"Will you carry this little girl into the Infirmary for us, please, Mr. Atterton?" requested Miss Luval quietly. Carlisle stood lost in admiration. One had to think of everything when one was a principal of a school.

"I should never have thought of sending for Mr. Atterton!" thought Carlisle.

"I've sent for Dr. Bradbury," said Miss Luval in

a low voice to Miss Cameron. And another wave of admiration swept over Carlisle. Goodness, to think even of *that!* And to give orders so swiftly and so simply that no time was wasted at all! Even Miss Cameron had to admire.

"You think of everything!" she responded beneath her breath, following Mr. Atterton and that little slender form in his arms.

To Carlisle, the next twenty minutes were long, long ones. Dr. Bradbury, who lived not far from school, came at once, was ushered respectfully into the Infirmary by Miss Cameron. Then Carlisle was sent for and questioned. Had Renée had a recent shock, had she learned of some bad news? Carlisle told of the queer way Renée had acted that afternoon, and Dr. Bradbury turned triumphantly to Miss Luval and Miss Cameron.

"Just as I thought," he said. "No sign of heart trouble! Simply sheer hysteria, so acute as to cause unconsciousness. Her pulse is not too erratic. She is a highly strung, nervous type which needs to be watched." He turned to Carlisle. "Don't tell her any more ghost stories!" he said sharply.

"Oh, *no,* sir!" answered Carlisle fervently. And Miss Luval smiled.

There was a long breath, now, from Renée, and the doctor turned quickly back to her.

"Feeling better, now, eh?" he asked cheerfully. "This is no way to act out in company, young lady!"

Renée smiled uncertainly up at the big, bluff, genial man, who was beloved by pupils and teachers alike at

Harwood Hall. "Where—where am I?" she asked, in a puzzled voice.

"Right here in the Infirmary, dear," answered Miss Cameron quickly.

"I tried—tried to reach a bed—I felt queer—thought I'd lie down for a little—wanted some smelling salts in the Infirmary," went on Renée's murmuring voice. "But was—was it *this* room?"

"Well, here's where you are, isn't it?" laughed Miss Cameron evasively. "And here's where I'm going to keep you, to-night, Renée—so say good-night to her, Carlisle!"

Carlisle, bending over the other, found her room mate's dark eyes fixed intently upon her face.

"Ca'lisle," whispered Renée imperatively, "there was—a bed—a canopied bed—in that room—I went into!"

Carlisle, glancing at Miss Luval, saw her quick head-shake, dropped her gaze to smile down at her room mate. "Honestly, Renée, it's a crime *you* didn't get that pen on Shrove Tuesday, for your imagination is certainly wonderful!" she said calmly. "If you went into another room than this, a little while ago, I'll never tell!" And she was rewarded by Renée's fluttering little smile, acknowledging her bantering, as she followed Miss Luval from the Infirmary.

Renée was not convinced, however, for she murmured to Miss Cameron, when they were alone. "Some day I shall make 'em tell me where I was! It wasn't this room, I know that!"

But she never did. No one ever told her that it was into "Miss Melissa's room" she had wandered. Otherwise, she might have collapsed again, for her horror of that room grew, as, in fact, it did with all of the girls, who always passed it hurriedly, staring, big-eyed, over their shoulders.

CHAPTER XIII

CHARADES

EASTER drew near with the smile of spring to make it more joyous than usual that year. Out in the sunny side yard of the Harwood Hall grounds daffodils and jonquils were already pushing up their dainty, yellow heads through the rich, brown earth, while Miss Nancy's tulip bed was commencing to verify the promise of flaming beauty it would later achieve.

"Winter's nice," said Carlisle, hurrying into her church uniform on Palm Sunday, "but spring's nicer!"

"Down in N'Orleans," said Renée, a little note of homesickness creeping into her voice, "the market men are a-callin', 'Strawberries! Strawberries!' And, oh, the pompano will be wonderful—pompano cooked in a paper bag, Ca'lisle—as the Creoles know how to cook it——"

"What's pompano, Renée?" inserted Carlisle, looking for her white gloves. She glanced at the other's dreaming face. "Better hurry up," she advised, "you haven't even started to dress! Church line forms in about five minutes!"

Renée acted upon her advice; but her face still wore the absent, rather homesick expression.

"Pompano's fish, Ca'lisle—'bout the most delicious ——"

"Fish!" Carlisle made a little face. Like many mid-westerners, she was not especially fond of fish. "If you have to go into spring rhapsodies, Renée," she exclaimed in a disgusted voice, "can't you do it over something better than *fish*!"

Renée laughed. "Well, how about Aunt Pinky in her bright red turban out puttering among the green vegetables of the kitchen garden, with the palm trees and magnolias and banana trees as a background, and ABC, the gardener, lookin' on, mad as a hornet because she's pullin' up his young radishes and——"

"ABC!" Carlisle stopped in her distracted pulling open of dresser drawers to stare at her room mate. "Don't tell me any mother, even a colored one, would ever name a child ABC!"

"Suah as Ah'm bawn!" swore Renée, with an exaggerated drawl. "His name is actually and honestly ABC, Ca'lisle, and he's been ouah gardener for ovah twenty yeahs!"

Carlisle gave a helpless head shake. "And I suppose your cook's name is Addition-and-Subtraction!" she said ironically. She stood in the middle of the room and looked exasperatedly around her. "Now, where did I put my hat? I know I took it out of its Sunday box!"

Renée, who had started to dress long after Carlisle, and who apparently had not hurried in the least but now stood ready and waiting, glanced at her room mate and burst into a chuckle.

"If you-all'd only put yo' things away!" she said. And gave Carlisle a gentle push before the mirror.

Carlisle frowned, smiled. "Well, how'd I know it was on my head!" she demanded. "The shock of ABC's name alone is enough to make me do anything!"

Meanwhile, in Barbara's and Julie's room there were two sober faces as the girls also dressed for church.

"I'm terribly disappointed," Julie was saying. "Honestly, Barbara, Mother promised me away back at Christmas time she'd be on for my spring vacation—said she'd spend it up at Aunt C'listie's with me. And now here she writes she can't get back to New York in time and that Aunt C'listie couldn't have us, anyway—both she and Samantha, the hired girl, have been sick!"

"Well, all the more reason why you should come up to New York with me, Julie," urged Barbara seriously. "You and Dad and I will have a great time!"

"I'd have to wire Mother," said Julie. She hesitated. "But are you sure your Dad would want me, Babs?"

"Oh, I know he would!" cried Barbara. "Julie, even to say his name makes me homesick to see him. Seems to me as if I couldn't wait for next week to come!"

But alas, poor Barbara was doomed to wait longer than that before seeing her father again. Scarcely had she finished speaking than there was a light tapping upon the door and there stood Lily-Belle.

"Miss Luval done want to see you-all, Miss Gainsworth," she announced.

Barbara and Julie exchanged concerned glances. "Better hurry—it's almost church time!" warned the latter.

"Well, if I'm late, so'll Miss Luval be!" retorted Barbara curtly. "And that's that! But I wonder what I've done?"

There was no hint of sternness upon the face Miss Luval turned toward her pupil as the latter entered her "office" a few moments later, however. Only genuine concern for the disappointment sure to follow the reading of the telegram she silently held out to Barbara.

Barbara's eyes devoured the few terse lines.

"Kindly advise Barbara must leave for South America immediately. Better spend her spring vacation at school. Will make it up to her later. Signed ROBERT GAINSWORTH."

Barbara turned and looked at her principal. "Oh," she stammered, "isn't that—isn't that just too mean! And here I've invited Julie to go home with me!"

Miss Luval placed a sympathetic hand upon the shoulder above her own. "My dear, don't worry!" she said kindly. "The girls really do have lots of fun here at school during vacation. I go away for a rest, as do most of the teachers. But Miss Nancy is in charge, and she has always been voted a most interesting hostess!"

Barbara's disappointed, downcast face brightened a little. "I know she must be—she's so dear and jolly!" she said. "But, oh—I did want to see my dad!"

Miss Luval's sympathy did not waver. "Of course

you did!" she said warmly. "But I know, from what you have told me, Barbara, of your father, that he will make it up to you delightfully later on!"

And Barbara left the gracious presence comforted by that cordiality which is so easy to give and so rarely bestowed throughout life.

Of course, when it came to actually seeing other more fortunate girls importantly looking up train connections, to watching trunks being excitedly packed, to hearing holiday plans being discussed and re-discussed with endless interest, it was hard for the stay-at-schools! Good-hearted Fatty even desperately wrote home for permission to bring along the derelicts for the whole ten days; but her family had just emerged from a series of illnesses, and regretfully and sincerely —for they were as nice as Fatty—declined to issue such a wholesale invitation at that time.

"Later on, perhaps, Susan dear," wrote kind Mrs. Smith. "But tell your little friends to watch for the postman sometime while you are at home!" Fatty grinned as she looked up at tall Barbara. "Little friends! Ha!"

"All joking aside, though, Fatty," began Julie, hanging perilously over the edge of the trunk Fatty was packing, "I think——"

"Joking aside! What do you mean?" taunted Barbara, reaching over to rumple her room mate's yellow head. "Little friend just about suits you, Julie."

"All joking aside," repeated Julie, dodging the teasing hand and fixing a scornful eye upon the other, "and

I wouldn't *be* six feet, anyway, so there, Barbara Gainsworth!—I think your mother must be a peach, Fatty!"

"She is!" nodded Fatty enthusiastically. "Although she's a heavyweight like me, too—and you'd think she was more like a pair! Ha!" For which dreadful pun both Barbara and Julie transferred their warfare to her.

After the last departure for the last train of Miss Nancy's little car, after the last good-bye was waved and the last trunk had rattled away upon Mr. Atterton's small truck, four very sober young faces turned away from the open windows out of which they'd been peering.

"It'd be all right," said Carlisle, slamming down the window, "and I wouldn't mind staying at school one bit, only Barbara Gainsworth is going to stay, too! I don't know why her father had to go to South America just *now*!" she added gloomily.

Renée had to laugh at the inconsistency of this; but she turned pleadingly to her an instant later. "Oh, Ca'lisle, why don't you-all fo'git that silly feud, anyway. I just know—" she hesitated, for she was an honorable little soul—"somehow, I just know," she amended, "that Barbara doesn't feel the way you do!"

"She couldn't!" said Carlisle bitterly. "No one could!"

"If it were Kitty Evans," went on Renée meditatively, apparently not hearing her room mate's remark, "I could understand! She has really earned your dislike, Ca'lisle. But Barbara!"

"But Barbara!" repeated Carlisle disagreeably. "Be-

lieve it or not, I dislike Barbara a thousand times more than Kitty, for I feel only contempt for *her*!"

"Who's in disgrace with you now, Carlisle?" inquired Helen Benedict, sticking her head in at the door. "Come on over to my room, girls, and see all of the sewing jobs I've planned for vacation!"

Carlisle made a little mouth as she reluctantly followed Renée across and down the hall to Helen's room. "Goodness, Helen, why use up a perfectly good vacation doing stuff like this!" she exclaimed, waving her hand impatiently at the latter's window seat, where Helen had neatly arranged piles of stockings to be darned, underwear to be mended, and several piles of pretty articles to be embroidered.

"Why, I love it!" answered Helen in a surprised voice. "I love to sew and to embroider!"

When they were back in their own room, safely out of hearing, Carlisle turned tragically to her room mate.

"Isn't it perfectly pathetic to have a mentality like that!" she demanded. "Can't you just see the kind of woman Helen'll grow into, with two or three uninteresting children tagging around after her and a fat, bald-headed husband who'll prob'ly play golf every Sunday! She'll be absolutely happy with her little bridge parties and her one maid-of-all-work and her summer afternoons on her front piazza embroidering little girls' dresses! I know! We have a lot of women like that in Jonesville!"

"Yes, but Helen will be *happy*!" pointed out Renée. "The trouble with you-all, Ca'lisle, is that you don't want anyone else to live her own life! Everyone *can't*

like the things you do! What if you do hate embroidering and women's bridge parties and—and bald-headed husbands! Someone else loves them! What's the dif'? I really believe that's why you dislike Barbara Gainsworth—because she's a little different from you!"

"Maybe so, Mrs. Solomon," grumbled Carlisle. "But if they're going to be so different I'd rather they lived a long ways off from me, not under my nose like Barbara and Helen!"

"Now, Ca'lisle, you know you like *Helen*!" protested Renée, with an alarmed expression.

"Of course I do, goosie!" laughed Carlisle. "So don't worry! I'm not going to start any more feuds—not during vacation, anyway! Bad enough to have one on my hands!"

"All the more reason for ending that one, then," retorted Renée significantly. But Carlisle only grunted and shook her head.

"See who that is, Rene," she implored, an instant later, when a tap sounded upon the door. Renée, amiably obeying, revealed Lily-Belle, smilingly extending a note.

"Fo' the ladies ob this heah room," she announced, her smile deepening into a broad grin as she departed.

"It's from Miss Nancy," announced Carlisle, as she and Renée read it together.

A cheer-up party is planned for tonight,
So wear the funniest costume quite!
We'll meet in the parlor at the stroke of eight,
Be there promptly—or you'll rue being late!

" 'Rue bein' late' sounds ominous!" repeated Renée, giggling. "Now, what shall we weah, Ca'lisle?"

The tableful of young faces gathered together at one end of the big, deserted dining room, then, instead of being downcast, as might have been expected, were, thanks to Miss Nancy's thoughtfulness, bright and eager that evening. Miss Nancy was smiling and mysterious; but all of the girls' teasing did not make her reveal her plans for the "cheer-up party." All she would say was, "Don't be late!"

Promptly at eight o'clock, an incongruous assembly gathered in the parlor, a state apartment associated in most of the pupils' minds with formal visits of parents and grave discussions of their own young faults. Tonight, however, there was nothing formal about the room—rather, there was a charming air of informality.

Renée, entering timidly—for Carlisle had vanished immediately after dinner to dress in one of the empty bedrooms—decided it was the soft candlelight that toned down the harsh precision of squarely placed furniture, the hard outlines of steel engravings upon the wall, the stiff draperies of windows and doorway.

She found herself the last arrival, but when a very black-faced mammy, of strange proportions—due, one suspected, to sundry sofa pillows upon her person—announced in Miss Nancy's voice that it was still one minute *before* eight, the threatening figures about to pounce upon her desisted and retreated to their chairs. Renée, in her raincoat and silk pajamas and with her best summer hat—a lace one—perched upon her black hair, gazed curiously around her. There was Julie, looking so like a little immigrant lost in Barbara's

clothes that someone asked her facetiously how she "liked this country." There was Carlisle, in an old evening dress of Fatty's, which hung in folds upon her. There was Barbara looking as though she were about to burst out of Julie's church uniform, and Helen in someone's riding breeches and her own lacy négligé. The others bashfully or gigglingly appeared in similar misfits.

"Now," said the black mammy with Miss Nancy's voice, "are we all here?"

"Ten of us, aren't there?" inquired Barbara's terse voice.

"Right," nodded Miss Nancy. "Now choose sides —Carlisle, suppose you be captain of one side, and Helen, you of the other!"

"What're we going to play? What're we going to play?" demanded several voices at once.

"Charades," Miss Nancy announced. She settled herself comfortably in her chair, a large one with arms. "That end of the room for the stage," she added, "the hall for the 'green room' and costumes may be interchanged, but no new ones added! Now—choose, girls!"

"Julie!" chose Helen promptly.

"Renée!" said Carlisle, as promptly.

"Pauline," Helen decided.

"Phyllis," from Carlisle.

"Millicent!" Helen nodded at her.

"Hannah!" said Carlisle, not looking at Barbara, although both Julie and Renée were staring at her with panic-stricken eyes.

"Adele!" said Helen calmly.

'That leaves Barbara for you, Carlisle," said Miss Nancy serenely. "I'm judge, self-elected—this chair is too utterly comfortable to move," she added laughingly. "Now, somebody give me two pieces of paper or something that the girls may draw for first turn. One paper shorter than the other, Julie," she directed, as Julie produced an envelope from her pocket.

"Wait, wait!" Phyllis Haveron sprang forward as Julie was about to tear it. "Is that your mother's handwriting? Oh," in a tone of anguished appeal, "don't spoil it! I simply adore Gail Austin! Give it to me, Julie, and use something else!"

Julie laughed. "Take the address side," she said good-naturedly, tossing it over. "We'll use the blank side—unless that will be too much for your tender feelings, Phyllis!"

"Oh, go to!" laughed Phyllis, folding the precious souvenir and placing it inside the neck of her gown, "next to her heart!" as she whispered romantically to Helen.

Miss Nancy held out the two papers she had arranged with even ends protruding from her hand, and Carlisle, drawing first, won the longer end.

"All right, shoo!" Miss Nancy waved them laughingly toward the hall. "Only remember, girls, this is vacation and don't tax our brains too heavily."

"Well," said Carlisle, turning to her cast of fellow Thespians as they straggled out into the hall after her, "anyone got any ideas?" She studiously avoided looking at Barbara, although kind-hearted little Renée

had placed a friendly hand upon the tall girl's arm to be sure that she came with the rest.

Apparently no one had any idea whatsoever, for silence answered Carlisle.

"Good-night!" groaned Carlisle. "You're certainly an intelligent crowd! How about transportation?"

"Pretty good for a hick town, with trains running every other day," grinned Hannah.

"Don't be so witty!" said Carlisle crushingly. "Anyone else got a word? Gracious," she gave an impatient shrug, "wake up!"

"How about the word 'ingratiate'?" asked Barbara stiffly.

"In-gray-she-ate," elucidated Renée quickly. "Anyone got anything gray on? All we need is a cracker and a gray dress and someone to eat one, wearing the other. That's a peach, Barbara!" she ended admiringly.

Carlisle shook her head. "It's too short and too easy," she snapped. "Any other word?"

Barbara's face burned; but she said nothing, and Renée broke the little embarrassed silence that was being maintained by the other girls. "Is the word 'Invalidate' too short, too, Carlisle?" she asked. She turned with kindly inclusiveness to Barbara. "That's sort of stealing your thunder, Babs; but you won't mind?"

Barbara shook her head silently, and Carlisle nodded.

"In—valley—date," she diagramed verbally. "All right—how were you going to bring in the valley?"

"That's easy," said Renée. "What's conversation for?"

Three minutes later they all filed in. "Word of three syllables," announced Carlisle.

She and Renée, in stocking feet, pretended to be stamping along with Alpine sticks, while the other three girls, ostensibly upon a hotel piazza miles below them, seated themselves upon chairs and, taking out imaginary binoculars, watched them as they commenced their upward climb. At last, after various harrowing escapes from glaciers and saved by imaginary ropes, the mountain scalers reached their destination, and suddenly mounting upon chairs to indicate peaks they began a loud-voiced dialogue.

"Wonderful air up here!" observed Carlisle, drawing in great breathsful.

"Wonderful!" agreed Renée brilliantly, holding her hand to her ear as though she were deaf. She giggled a little.

"So different from down in the valley," shouted Carlisle.

"In what?" Renée asked.

"In the valley!" shouted Carlisle. Renée still staring at her inquiringly, with her hand to her ear, Carlisle tried it again. "In valley!" she shouted. "Air—in—valley!"

"Oh, yes," said the supposedly deaf Renée blandly. "I heard you the first time; but your mouth looked so funny when you were speaking I wanted to hear you say it again!"

Amid laughter, the actors filed solemnly out. But

soon two of them were back. Phyllis and Renée paced up and down, arm in arm, very slowly, without speaking. Soon Carlisle and Hannah appeared, tipped imaginary hats, bowed gallantly and each taking a "lady" upon "his" arm walked off in opposite directions. It was Julie who called out the answer.

When their turn came for Helen's group, Julie appeared alone, announcing that it was a word of two syllables. She posed smilingly first upon one side of the "stage," then upon the other, and, heaving a long sigh, walked slowly out the door. The audience waited for a moment, then Helen poked her head into the parlor and said, "Well?"

Miss Nancy smiled, but Carlisle exclaimed blankly, "Well, what's the rest of it?"

"That's all," said Helen. "There isn't any more!"

"Do you know?" Carlisle turned puzzled eyes upon Miss Nancy, who nodded.

"Do you?" Renée turned to Barbara, but Barbara only smiled wisely.

"Two syllables?" asked Hannah. Then, at Helen's acquiescing smile, she laughed. "I know it—it's 'alone,' isn't it, Helen?"

When Helen nodded, Renée and Carlisle got up automatically and shook each other by the hand. "Perfect specimen of dumbbells!" groaned the latter.

The evening went quickly, after that. Before anyone could realize it, Lily-Belle was smilingly bringing in pitchers of ice-cold fruit punch and plates of Aunt Lide's cookies, announcing that it was after ten

o'clock. Then, as the candles burned low, they sang, with a delicious feeling of unrestraint.

"Sure both Mrs. Lawtry and Miss Dempsey are gone?" demanded someone between "Old Black Joe" and "Swanee River."

"Absolutely sure!" confirmed Miss Nancy. "Drove them down to the station myself! Only Miss Cameron and I are left," she added laughingly, "and even she is away for the evening!"

So the close harmony went on for another half hour, with—not "Home, Sweet Home" for an ending, for that might have been too much for even the most steady of youthful nerves, but "Oh, Susannah," with its delightful swing and cheery courage.

Then the evening ended in a gale of laughter, for it was found, when good-nights had been said, that Miss Nancy, with all of her pillow avoirdupois, had chosen her chair not wisely but too well, for she could not budge.

"Goodness," she sighed, when they had pried and pulled her out, "that teaches me a lesson. I shall start in to-morrow to diet!"

Carlisle glanced at her slender figure, still as lithe and active as a girl's beneath the concealing pillows, and grinned. "You remind me strangely of Fatty," she said ironically. "She is *always* going to diet—to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XIV

A FALSE ALARM

BARBARA threw a lazy pebble into the little outdoor fish pond Mr. Atterton had filled that day. She and Julie were seated upon a cement bench beside it.

"Doesn't seem possible we only have one more day of spring vacation," she said, "and that the girls will all be back to-morrow, does it?"

Julie shook her head. "It's really been fun, hasn't it, this vacation!" she exclaimed. "And oh, those perfectly wonderful packages from Fatty's mother! And that dandy box from Sherry's that your father sent before he sailed! Really, Barbara, you're awfully lucky to have such a nice father! I tell you," a shade of sadness passed over Julie's bright face, "if you've never had one, you're apt to envy the girls who have!"

"Everything nice you can say about my Dad," responded Barbara, with kindling face, "isn't any too nice! He's just plain—wonderful, that's all! Your—father—died, didn't he, Julie?" she added, a trace of delicate hesitancy in her voice.

"I think so," replied Julie, in a low tone. "My mother never seemed to want to speak of him, Barbara, so, as I got older, I just never asked. But I al-

ways thought he must have died." Her eyes were fixed upon the distant puttering figure of Mr. Atterton. "He's a pathetic specimen, isn't he!" she nodded in his direction and Barbara was instantly aware of the subject having been gently changed. "What a job for a real man—janitor in a girls' school!" And Julie's dainty lips curled a little.

"It's a contrast like that that makes me appreciate the brains and ability of my father more, if that could be done!" said Barbara. "Even the way Dad walks shows the difference in his character—see how poor Mr. Atterton sort of shuffles along, his shoulders bent over, with a stray, lost appearance to him! Half of the time he hardly seems to know which direction he's going."

"Yet he's pretty thorough and, in the end, quite efficient," said Julie. "Miss Luval depends an awful lot upon him. Let me see that 'snap' of your father again, Babs" she added, stretching out her hand for it.

Barbara at once slipped off the little platinum locket she always wore around her neck and, opening it, gave it to Julie. The face of a masculine Barbara—a Barbara with dark-clipped moustache and grayish, close-cropped hair and square, determined face and piercing dark eyes looked back at Julie as she bent over the locket. The eyes seemed almost to speak, the impression of dynamic power and forceful personality was apparent at the first glance. The girls stared down at the little photograph in silence for a moment, then Julie sighed.

"He really is a peach, I should think!" she said,

turning the locket over to examine its lovely decorations of diamonds and sapphires. "Though I think I should be a little afraid of him, at that, Barbara.—Oh! I didn't hear you come up, Mr. Atterton!" Here Julie gave a nervous start that caused the locket to slip from her extended fingers, as she was about to hand it back to Barbara, and to land, open, at Mr. Atterton's feet.

The school janitor, stooping automatically to pick it up, remained in an attitude of arrested attention, the locket upon his horny palm as he stared down at it. The two pupils of Harwood Hall gazed up at him curiously from their bench. Then Mr. Atterton gave an ejaculation.

"Bob!" he said, in a strange, far-away voice.

Barbara's mouth opened in amazement. "Why, do you know my father?" she exclaimed.

But Mr. Atterton drew a vague hand across his forehead, glanced at her unseeingly, and, placing the locket in her hand, shook his head.

"No, no!" he muttered, shuffling away. They could hear him, as he stooped to pull some weeds from Miss Nancy's tulip bed, repeating, "No, no! No, no!"

"He's like a clock," giggled Julie under her breath. "Once you get him wound up, he'll prob'ly go on saying, 'No, no!' until he runs down!"

"But wasn't it queer he should know my father's name!" returned Barbara, turning upon the bench to stare with puzzled eyes after the now distant, shambling figure.

"Oh, don't you think it was a coincidence?" yawned

Julie carelessly. "He could never have had anything to do with your father—I mean, know him well enough to call him 'Bob.' Maybe he saw a resemblance to someone he used to know—lots of men are your father's type. I think Mr. Atterton's sort of cracked, myself."

"Oh, I think so, too," agreed Barbara quickly. "He's very eccentric, anyway, to say the least! But he's harmless and, as you said, efficient and makes a good janitor, which is all he's asked to be. And doubtless his saying Dad's name *was* just a coincidence."

The sound of voices upon the garden path near them, the next minute, made them look up. Barbara's expression changed as she recognized Carlisle, arm in arm with Renée. Her sensitive features at once settled into a stiff pretense of unconsciousness, and her dark eyes gazed out over the school grounds with an aloofness that her father's were wont to assume when someone opposed him at a directors' meeting, sometimes.

Carlisle, however, was too full of eager excitement to glance at Barbara this morning. "Oh, Julie!" she burst out, as soon as she was within hailing distance. "We're celebrating the last day of spring vacation by getting away from these old school grounds for—but you tell her, Renée!"

Renée's face was equally bright. "For a picnic—near the river, Miss Nancy said," she cried. "We're going to hike—it's quite a ways over the hills, then cook our dinner and not come back until sundown. Think of it, a whole day of freedom outdoors!"

Julie jumped to her feet and flung open her arms in

a gesture of pure joy. "Why, I didn't know how tired I was of these school grounds until just now!" she said wonderingly.

"You're not, really!" contradicted Carlisle. "That's just the warm spring sun in your veins! You wait and see how glad you'll be to see them when you come limping home to-night, all tired out! And that reminds me, girls, Miss Nancy said to wear your oldest, most practical, low-heeled shoes!" she added. "And we're to start at once, so hurry up!"

It was a merry party of eleven that sallied forth a little later from the Gym entrance and, marching across the meadow, moved slowly up the hill. Each girl was laden with more than she needed, of course, in the way of books, cameras, and sweaters; but that, at first, only added to the fun. At the top of the hill they all paused instinctively to gaze at the view, so different to-day from the snowy, blue-shadowed one they had enjoyed the day they had coasted there. Balmy and sweet-smelling, the air enfolded them softly. Blue sky overhead, downy baby clouds afloat, the lovely first green of meadow grass and leafing trees —all united in a symphony to spring that seemed to find an echo in the happy young faces of the hikers.

But soon they were plunging down the hill on the other side and scrambling over a stone-walled terrace into a pretty lane that led out of the town over more hills, as far as eye could reach. They did not, however, follow the lane beyond the third hill. There, Miss Nancy turned sharply to her left and entered a

little stretch of woodland which the girls found refreshing after the sunny road.

"Who'd think it could be so warm!" murmured Barbara, taking off her black tam to mop her glistening forehead. "Whew, I feel as though it could be July or August with no effort at all!"

"That's because you're carrying too many things!" protested Julie. "And why did I ever bring a camera, anyway? Every way I carry it, it seems to find a new and sharper corner to jab me with!"

"Here, let me carry it awhile!" And Barbara reached out a long arm.

"I will not!" Julie flashed her a grateful glance. "You look like somebody's pack mule, now! Whose sweater is that you're carrying? It's not yours, I know! And whose umbrella, for pity's sake?"

"Sh!" Barbara cast a warning look at the girls ahead of Julie and her. "It's Carlisle's sweater," she went on, in a lowered voice. "She threw it down awhile ago—back on top of that hill, you remember, where we were standing—and went off without it."

"Well, that's no reason you should be lugging it!" retorted Julie indignantly. "Here—Car——"

But a firm hand was clapped over Julie's mouth. "How about your letting me run this, woman?" said Barbara firmly.

"Well, I would—if you could only run!" giggled Julie. "As it is, you can hardly stagger along, Babs! And now, tell me, why the umbrella?"

Barbara grinned as she glanced up at the blue sky.

" 'Spring showers bring May flowers,' " she quoted sarcastically.

"Yes, but whose is it?" insisted Julie. "You can't tell me it's yours!"

"I'm not," replied Barbara. "It's Helen's! Who *would* carry one but her!"

"Well," commenced Julie impatiently.

"Aw, Julie, have a heart! Look at Helen and then see if you have the nerve to ask her to carry one thing more!"

Julie looked, then began to laugh. For indeed poor Helen, with her embroidery bag, with magazines, with a paint box and a large shawl and a small pillow, besides her quota of lunch packages and an extra sweater or two, was a walking illustration of how *not* to go on a picnic!

"I guess you're right, Barbara—it would be cruel beyond belief to ask Helen to carry even her own umbrella in addition to that load!" chuckled Julie. "But, here—let me carry something more!"

"No!" Barbara shook her stubborn head.

"Same old case of skis-carrying, isn't it?" murmured Julie resignedly. "You've just got to learn the unselfishness of being selfish at the right time and place, Barbara Gainsworth. Other people like to do things for *you* once in awhile, and there is a gracious acceptance of gifts that is as fine as gracious giving. (That's quoted! From Miss Luval, I think!)"

A little silence settled down as the two girls tramped across the sunny meadow after Miss Nancy. Then Barbara rolled one eye down at her shorter comrade.

"Julie," she said very, very meekly, "would you mind carrying my lunch box for a little while?" And with a gale of laughter the change was effected.

On and on they tramped, out of that meadow into another, out of the other into a by-lane that twisted and turned and went erratically uphill for a distance only to lead at sharp right angles in another direction. Miss Nancy kept casting merry, mischievous glances over her shoulders at certain of the young hikers who were beginning to lag.

"I've heard," she said in her clear voice, "that certain of us 'have grown sick and tired of Harwood Hall grounds,' so I thought," gravely, "that we'd try and get as far away from them, to-day, as we could!"

Several guilty glances were exchanged; but as Miss Nancy gazed at no one especially, no one said anything in reply. Only Helen, a fairly stout girl, began to puff, while her face slowly changed from deep red to purple beneath the fierce rays of a rather out-of-season sun.

"You—you think we're almost there?" she panted to Phyllis, stumbling heavily along as Miss Nancy led a blithe way around a field of young wheat into a smooth, treeless meadow.

Phyllis, conscious that her feet hurt, laughed rather bitterly as she shifted her load. "My goodness, we've been walking long enough to have gotten *anywhere!*" she answered. "But I don't see any signs of a river"—she craned her neck—"and someone said we were going to camp beside a river, which sounds good, if we can hold out!"

At that moment, however, Miss Nancy turned gaily around. "There's our destination!" she cried, waving her hand toward a little stretch of woodland, with a background of mountain and blue sky beyond the hot, sunny meadow.

By mutual consent, everyone stopped and gazed. Then Barbara turned and looked at Julie.

"Don't tell me that this is where all our hiking has led us!" she whispered, in disgusted emphasis. "My goodness, with all these mountains to choose from, there must have been a real river somewhere! Why, this is only a brook, Julie—see, over there at the edge of this field! It reminds me of the dinky little things they call rivers over in Europe!"

"Cheer up!" said Julie more hopefully. "It may be real pretty over there among the trees, and the brook may widen into a pool, there. Anyway," she sighed, pushing back her thick, yellow hair, "it will be *cool!*"

Julie was right. It really was a delightful spot that Miss Nancy had selected in which to spend the day. As soon as one entered the cool, quiet, green place, one was conscious of peace and restfulness unmarred by the bird songs that could be heard, the fluttering of pretty wings, and the glint of a stray butterfly that had wandered in from the hot meadow outside. And the brook did indeed widen into a pool—edged by mossy rocks and fine-leafed ferns that nodded and smiled at themselves in the water below them. There was sunshine, too—great patches of it shifting through the green canopy of arching tree branches. And flat

rocks, here and there, seemed to invite weary hikers to seat themselves and relax.

The girls scattered at once, after throwing down their burdens. "See, Barbara," said Julie, kneeling upon the edge of the pool to peer into it with sparkling eyes, "there's a cunning tadpole!"

"It's a fish! A baby fish!" replied Barbara, coming to peer over Julie's shoulder interestedly.

The next instant there was a scream and a splash and Barbara was staring with aghast eyes—not at the baby fish, but at a very forlorn room mate rising in dripping reproach from the two-foot depths of the pool!

Miss Nancy and the other girls came rushing up, the lips of the former trembling with mirth as her eyes went from Barbara's astounded face to Julie's soaking clothes and hair, for she had gone completely under the water. But she was all practicality at once.

"Strip everything off, Julie!" she commanded. "Somehow, we'll have to get your clothes dry—and keep you warm while we're doing it! I guess we'll build a fire—though the sunshine out in that field might do as well. However, we have to build a fire to cook the frankfurters, anyway, so I think we'll do that!"

"Oh, dear, Julie!" Barbara kept flapping her long, slender hands remorsefully. "Oh, dear!"

Helen came hurrying up. "Take my big umbrella and hold it, Barbara—hold it down, you know—then Julie can undress behind it and wrap up in some of our extra sweaters and my big shawl!"

"That will be fine!" said Miss Nancy approvingly. "You have a wise head on young shoulders, Helen!" Renée met Carlisle's eyes significantly and the latter had the grace to blush. "Now, some of you girls scatter to find firewood and we'll have Julie's clothes dry in no time!"

"Any matches?" asked Carlisle.

"Plenty!" Miss Nancy slapped her sweater pocket. "Remember," she raised her voice, "the firewood has to be good and dry, girls, with some small brush to get it started!"

Then she looked keenly at Julie. "Hurry," she said sharply. "You're shivering, child! Take one of the sweaters—that white, woolly one there—is it yours, Hannah? You don't mind, do you?—Take that, Julie, and rub yourself hard with it! By that time, we'll have the fire well started and you can get warm!"

A scene of bustling activity ensued. Almost as soon as Julie's shaking fingers had managed to pull off her wet clothing, the other girls were back with firewood, and Miss Nancy revealed an excellent knowledge of woodcraft by starting the fire with no difficulty at all.

How the girls laughed, though, when Julie hesitatingly appeared from behind the umbrella Barbara had been patiently holding for her, for she looked as though she had just stepped down from her old-fashioned pedestal in front of a cigar store—a walking Indian cigar sign, in her gay shawl and outstretched hand, for she had to hold it up! But she soon got

over her embarrassment and only shook her head at the others' teasing.

"Shipwrecked heroines have nothing on me," she said complacently. "Slave, fetch my clothes and spread them on yon rock to dry!" She gave a lordly nod at Barbara, who, still remorseful, hurried away at once.

"Wait, we're going to dry them close beside the fire," interrupted Miss Nancy. "We're going to erect two crotched sticks on the other side, there, place a third one across them, and use it as a clothes horse!"

"Fine," nodded Julie, squatting down upon a rock near the fire and holding up her hands gratefully to its comforting warmth, while the rest of the girls, avoiding its heat and fanning themselves and saying "Whew!" every few minutes, began to cast hungry eyes at the packages of lunch collected upon another rock. "Only," went on Julie doubtfully, "won't the crotched sticks be hard to find?"

"We have to have a lot of them—to roast the frankfurters on," said Miss Nancy. "Carry on, girls—no use to start even looking at the lunch until we get our sticks!" She laughed as they scampered in every direction. "Hunger's a good whip," she added.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later, the picnickers had all straggled back again, and Carlisle was wrestling with a long, blunt-ended stick, trying to force it into the ground, when a wild shriek sounded from the underbrush, and Renée burst through.

"A snake! I saw a snake!" she gasped. "That

big!" And her arms described a huge circle to end unsteadily about two feet apart. Carlisle dropped her stick and ran to verify it. Soon she was back, laughing heartily.

A garter snake, she explained to Miss Nancy, about six inches long. "By that big rock there, wasn't it?" She turned to Renée, who had commenced to look rather sheepish. "You must have scared the poor, harmless thing almost to death," she went on. "He's still there, stretched out, petrified!"

"More likely he's in a patch of sunshine thawing himself out after his winter's nap," said Miss Nancy practically. She examined the sticks the girls had brought to her, discarded some and laid aside others for use. "Now, get busy, everyone. The frankfurters are in that package there, and the rolls in that paper bag. And here are sandwiches for those too hungry to wait! That clothes rack ready yet, Carlisle child?" She turned to Carlisle, who had gone back to her task.

The young girl turned a very red face toward her teacher as she strugged with the sticks, for, although the ground was soft, she could not seem to make them stand erect. "Can't seem—to—do—it!" she grunted.

Suddenly a voice spoke behind her. "Here, let me!" And two capable hands took the job away from here. Carlisle, about to smile gratefully, stiffened.

"Thank you," she said shortly, walking away, for the rescuer was Barbara. But she was quick to note out of the corner of her eye how the other girl rubbed the sticks on a sharp rock to point them before plung-

ing them forcibly into the soft ground and how easily they went in.

"Now, why didn't I think of that?" reflected Carlisle. But aloud she only said hungrily, "When's the party begin?"

Miss Nancy turned around. "Oh, there you are, Carlisle! Here, take this stick—no, there are plenty more! And roast your 'weenie' as you like it! I've saved a plate of sandwiches for you, too—you're probably starved! And you've earned your lunch!"

But Carlisle was honest. "Barbara's really earning it," she said drily, nodding at the other girl on the opposite side of the fire.

"Well, Barbara's plate is waiting for her over there beside Julie," returned Miss Nancy. "Everyone served?" She looked around her inquiringly.

"Poor Miss Nancy, you're not getting anything!" said Carlisle.

" 'Youth will be served!' " laughed the teacher. "However, I shall be, too, right now!" And picking up a huge ham sandwich, she disappeared behind it as behind a screen.

The day passed happily. No more accidents marred the afternoon, and Julie's clothes, beside a fire kept brisk by willing hands, soon dried, so that she could emerge from her shawl, a little wrinkled and mussed, it is true, but none the worse, apparently, for her mishap. The girls read aloud by turns, all except Helen, who would not put down her beloved embroidery, and after awhile some of them napped, lying outstretched upon the sweaters they had discarded.

About four-thirty, however, Miss Nancy looked up suddenly at a darkening landscape. "Why, it's awfully early to get dark!" she said.

"It's a storm, I'm afraid," Julie informed her, for she had been out in the more open meadow playing ball with Barbara, and had seen the sky.

Miss Nancy, calling to the girls, began to snatch up sweaters and sort out cameras and books. "Queer," she murmured, "here under these trees I hadn't noticed the sunshine's departure at all! Phyllis," she called, "isn't this your sweater, dear—on the rock, here? And, Helen—your umbrella, my child! Don't you want it?"

Helen Benedict turned around, a distressed face showing above the huge armful of articles she was departing with, from the picnic spot.

"Go along, Helen," nodded Barbara, coming up at that moment. "I'll carry the 'bumber-shoot' for you!" And Helen, with a smile, hurried after the girls who were going on ahead.

"I ought to carry it, Babs," said Julie. "I was the only one who used it!"

"Because I gave you cause to use it," retorted Barbara, placing the umbrella beneath her arm.

"Why, no, you didn't! I really fell in, myself!" protested Julie. "You had nothing to do with it!"

"Oh, didn't I! Ask the little fishes whose fault it was! However," Barbara looked at her room mate severely, "don't stand there arguing any longer—the others are 'way ahead of us! And it's going to pour before we reach the road beyond that field—you see!"

Barbara was right. Before they were even halfway across the field, great, scattering drops of rain commenced to spatter upon them! The others had almost reached the road by that time, Miss Nancy turning to call anxious admonitions to them, which they could not hear because the wind caught her voice and carried it in the opposite direction.

"I believe she is telling us to hurry," grunted Barbara ironically. "I wonder if she thinks we're going to stop and camp out here in the middle of this wet nowhere! Oh, hang this umbrella!" For with diabolical persistency the umbrella *would* keep getting between poor Barbara's feet as though trying to trip her. As for the books she was carrying, every one of them was trying to slip out of her arms at once!

"Oh, Barbara!" There was a little gasp of pain from Julie. "I've turned my ankle! Wait a minute, will you? Ow! Feels like it's broken!"

"It's those silly, high-heeled shoes you're wearing, Julie!" scolded Barbara, stopping nevertheless. "Why on earth didn't you wear your walking shoes?"

"Carlisle borrowed them—hated to ask her for them—she wore them again to-day!" Julie, rather pale-faced, cast her load of camera and books upon the ground and stooped to rub the poor ankle.

Barbara nobly repressed the bitter words she was about to utter; instead, she raised the umbrella and held it over Julie's head.

"Might as well find some use for the old thing," she said. "If we've got to wait here in the rain, we can be comfortable, goodness knows!"

"I'm all right now," said Julie, raising her head. She caught up the camera and books. "Only I'll have to walk slowly, Babs!"

They started off again, this time with the umbrella held to keep off the beating rain. Presently, however, vague shouts came to their ears, and Barbara, peering out from beneath it, saw that the others had reached the shelter of a little tree beside the road and were waiting for them, there. Only, they seemed very much excited and kept dancing up and down and pointing wildly.

"That's queer," muttered the puzzled Barbara, swinging around to look behind her. Julie, brought to a stop, gave a little groan. The next instant she looked up, for Barbara was speaking in a queer, breathless way.

"Listen, Julie," she commanded, "walk as fast as you possibly can toward the road! *Run,* if you can! A—an animal has jumped the gate from the next field, and he's coming this way. I'll amuse him for a little with this umbrella! Only hurry!"

Julie's pale face whitened still more from fright. "But you, Babs!" she gasped.

"Don't worry about me," replied Barbara, between her teeth. "Only run!"

Julie obeyed her. Somehow, Barbara's voice must have sounded like her father's, for there were times when no one thought of disobeying him!

Dropping her bundles, Barbara lowered her umbrella at the galloping animal approaching her. But, to her utter amazement, instead of charging at her

when it got near enough, the animal stopped short and gazed wonderingly out of large, mild eyes at the strange object being flaunted in its very face. Then, shaking its head to rid itself of the pieces of wood which had been hung there to keep it from jumping the gate, it switched its tail and lumbered away.

Not stopping to laugh, Barbara retrieved her bundles and ran after Julie as fast as she could. The other girl, near the stone wall, now, that separated the meadow from the road, turned a frightened face toward Barbara as the latter came up. But Barbara could laugh, now.

"Only a c-cow!" stammered she. "And I—I thought I was—was heroically saving you from—from being gored to d-d-death by a wild bull!"

Then, holding onto each other, they laughed until they cried, while the others fumed and fretted beneath the little tree.

How Miss Nancy got lost, confused by the darkness and the rain, how they wandered around for an hour or two through strange lanes and fields until set right by a staring farmer boy, how they all limped forlornly into the Harwood Hall grounds long after the dinner gong, would take too much time to tell, here! But it was Julie who sighed, "Heaven punish me if I ever say that I'm sick of these school grounds again! I could kiss that stone bench over there by the fish pond!" And Helen said complacently, "Well, at first I was afraid I had taken too many things with me for hiking; but everything got used, I notice, even the umbrella!"

CHAPTER XV

MYSTERY

THE Spanish Gren-a-deer stood in his re-tree-eet——"

Julie paused on the threshold of Fatty's room and laughingly surveyed the scene before her. Carlisle Martin, with the chafing dish balanced miraculously upon her head for a helmet, a hand mirror for her guitar, somebody's umbrella stuck through someone else's scarf around her waist in lieu of sword and sword-belt, was impersonating, with bows and sighs and rolling of eyes, the lovelorn Grenadier. Fatty, resplendent in her new iridescent party dress, with the bedspread hanging majestically from her shoulders for a train, with a fringed towel around her head for a lace mantilla and a newspaper, folded fanwise and held up that she might peep coquettishly over it down into Carlisle's eyes, occupied a perilous position upon the bed, leaning upon a couple of chairs which had been piled there for a "balcony railing." Renée was the orchestra, assisting Carlisle's "guitar," while sundry other girls were crowded into one corner of the room as audience.

"Remember what I sa—hay and be troo-oo, de-eear!"

All would have gone well had not Fatty, at that moment, in order to gaze yet more languishly into her swain's eyes, shifted a trifle upon the unsteady "balcony railing." Instantly there was a gasp, a swift vision of Fatty pawing the air for a balance, and then a crash, with Carlisle, Fatty, and the chair hopelessly entangled in a heap upon the floor, while the "orchestra" stopped with a croak of dismay. And the audience rushed to the rescue.

"Good-night!" Amid the peals of laughter that swept the room as soon as it was discovered no one was really injured, Carlisle sat up and thoughtfully examined the dents in the abused chafing dish. "I thought you said you had been dieting again, Fatty."

"I have!" returned that insulted young woman indignantly, dragging herself out from beneath the chairs and rubbing her elbows industriously. "I've lost ten pounds!"

"You'd never know it!" retorted Carlisle cruelly. "You felt like exactly one million pounds, me love, as ye hefted forrards into my arms!"

"Well," sniffed Fatty, "if that's all the good my dieting's done, I'll start on that pound of candy Cousin Albert sent me, this very evening."

"Candy!" "Girl, have you been concealing candy and not telling us!" "Fatty, this time you guessed wrong—you'll not wait until evening! You'll start on that candy *now,* this very minute!" Instantly, a chorus of cries arose and a group of threatening figures surrounded Fatty. But she scrambled to her feet and grinned at them wickedly.

"Huh, threaten me, will you! Well, now, let me tell *you* something, my little dears! If you want that candy now, 'this very minute,' suppose you go and get it, then. Old Constitution has it. It came in the mail this morning, and she just mentioned she had it and would I please come and get it *this evening!*"

"Oh, dear!" The chorus instantly subsided into grumbling. No one was brave enough to venture into the lion's den before the appointed time. "Isn't that mean! What'd you mention the candy for a-tall, Fatty, when you knew you couldn't have it before to-night!"

"Oh, we'll have it now, 'this very minute'!" taunted Fatty, rolling her eyes around the circle of disappointed faces. "We'll have it now! Will somebody please fetch it for me?"

"Cease firing!" commanded Julie, stepping forward from the doorsill where, unnoticed, she had been chuckling. "And I'll whisper a secret! Aunt C'listie sent me a real-honest-to-goodness chocolate cake which Mrs. Lawtry did *not* see, because it came 'special' and not in the regular mail, and if you'll wait a minute . . ." She turned and vanished, while Fatty clasped her hands over her stomach and pretended to stagger toward the window seat.

"I cannot wait!" she moaned hollowly. "I'm starving—for chocolate cake! Yet would I wait a million years for one of Aunt Calista's home-made cakes! That woman can *cook!*"

"It's really S'manthy's cake—the hired girl, you know," explained Julie, reappearing with a huge box

in her arms. "But it's Aunt C'listie's thoughtfulness that sends it to me."

"Who is this mysterious Aunt Calista who is always sending you such wonderful things to eat?" asked one of the girls, as the cake was disappearing amid "ohs" and "ahs" of appreciation.

"Oh, just a relative," answered Julie carelessly, although she flushed. There it cropped up again! Who *was* Aunt Calista, and why had her mother never taken her up to Connecticut to see her but that once, last summer? The old mystery remained unsolved.

"By the way, Fatty, I've asked Barbara to drop in," went on Julie offhandedly. "Is that all right by you?"

"Of course!" "No!" Simultaneously, the two answers came. The girls all looked at each other uncomfortably and then at Carlisle's suddenly blazing cheeks and snapping eyes.

"What's the idea, Julie, trying to force that girl on us? We don't want her in here," said the latter, now.

Julie drew herself up. Surprisingly, all at once, she looked like Gail Austin at her most dignified moment. "I wasn't aware that this was your room, Carlisle," she said icily. Really, Carlisle was carrying things a bit too far!

"It isn't!" answered Carlisle sharply. "Just the same, we don't want that girl here and you know it. Why try to force her on the crowd? Nobody wants her."

"Is that true?" Julie demanded of Fatty and Renée.

Renée, disliking a scene, hesitated; but Fatty spoke bluntly.

"No, it isn't true," she said. "I, for one, like Barbara Gainsworth immensely, and since this is my room, she will be welcome here as my guest!"

She looked at Renée pointedly, and the other, blushing, rose to come over and place her hand placatingly upon Carlisle's arm.

"I, too, like Barbara. And I think, Ca'lisle deah, you-all ought not to try and run things so that poor Barbara is always left out."

"Well, if that's the way everyone feels," Carlisle sprang to her feet and looked furiously around her at the sober faces, "I'll get out! Coming, Renée?"

"Oh, have a heart!" Renée made a gesture of reluctance, feeling loyalty to her angry room mate rather like a millstone around her neck. "Fatty didn't say she didn't want you, Ca'lisle! Why can't you stay and be nice even if Barbara does come? No one wants you to go!"

"That's all right!" stammered Carlisle in a voice that said it was all wrong. "No—no room is big enough to hold Barbara Gainsworth and me, outside of school hours, at the same time!"

"Oh, pshaw! "Don't be a nut, Carlisle!" "That's acting like a little kid!"

But the chorus of remonstrances mingled with the slam of Fatty's door. Carlisle had flung herself out of the room. As Renée slowly followed, Julie looked around her with trembling lips.

"That's too bad!" she said, the tears twinkling in her eyes.

"Don't you care, Julie!" Fatty got up from beside the cake box and lumbered over to place her arms around the other's slim shoulders. "Carlisle's about due for a spill, anyway. If we don't show her she can't have everything her own charming way all the time, Providence will!"

"What do you mean?" Julie dried her eyes and looked up at the fat girl.

"I mean, something bigger than Carlisle can manage will happen," answered the latter seriously. "Y'see, I don't believe that girl's ever had to give up anything she really wanted, from what she's told me. In spite of a lot of brothers, she's always had the best of everything in that family. Well," Fatty shrugged her shoulders, "life's not made that way. You can't have your cake and eat it, too, unless other people will let you have theirs, and they soon tire of that. Cake?" Fatty brought her philosophical speech to a sudden close. "Where have I heard that word before?" She ambled back to the cake box, which still stood in the center of the room, to peer anxiously into it, then raised her head to strike a dramatic attitude, finger pointed reproachfully at her giggling guests. "Varlets, ye ate up *every crumb* while my back was turned!"

"Avaunt, villain, draw thy sword and defend thy claim!" Someone picked up the umbrella and made a lunge at Fatty, and instantly laughing confusion filled the room. This was brought to a sudden stop

by smart rapping upon the door and the sound of a deep voice demanding admission. "Mrs. Lawtry!" groaned Fatty.

There was dismayed silence. Then, "Open the door, young ladies!" came the voice again. The doorknob rattled impatiently.

Against her will, Fatty moved forward. "Who locked it?" she whispered bewilderedly. But she had no sooner reached the closed door than she started back, for it burst open and revealed naughty Julie, who had slipped out unnoticed, a moment previous.

"Fooled you that time!" grinned Julie, crowing. "You look like a bunch of scared sheep! What guilty consciences you must have, all of you!"

The next instant she had to turn and flee before the combined wrath of the crowd. And for some time her pounding footsteps and her squeals could be heard up and down the corridors until she was caught and properly punished.

That night, however, just before bedtime, Barbara glanced anxiously across the study table at her room mate. "Don't you feel well, Julie?" she asked in her abrupt manner.

Julie raised a hot, aching head from icy hands. "Oh, I feel all right," she said, trying to answer brightly. "I was just thinking."

"Thinking?" Barbara half sighed. She, too, had been thinking, wondering, planning how to obtain Carlisle's friendship.

"Yep—about a lot of things." Gravely, Julie looked across at the other. "I don't believe you really

know how much I like you, old lady, nor how much I appreciate your skinning up the rope and saving my life that day."

"Oh, forget it, Julie!" Barbara gave an uncomfortable laugh. "See here," she went on hurriedly, in an obvious endeavor to change the subject, "isn't this a queer un?"

"What?" Julie glanced incuriously at the slip of paper Barbara held out for her inspection. "It's one of your French exercises, isn't it?" she added.

"No."

"It isn't? It certainly *is* your handwriting, Babs!" Julie leaned forward to examine the paper more carefully.

"It really isn't, though," said Barbara crisply. "It's Carlisle's handwriting. Mademoiselle gave it back to me this morning, because it had no name on it and she, too, thought it was my handwriting."

"Well, that's certainly queer! I'd have sworn it was your handwriting!" responded Julie, staring down interestedly at the paper. "See, there are your t's and your straight-lined m's! Why, Barbara, I'd swear that you had written that French exercise! Queer, isn't it, that two people who disliked each other as you and Carlisle should write so exactly alike!"

"Isn't it!" said Barbara moodily. She did not tell Julie that the dislike was all too one-sided, for not often did Barbara reveal her feelings as much as she had that homesick afternoon to Renée.

The next morning Julie felt quite ill; but she dragged herself out of bed, and, after breakfast,

during a brief recreation period, when the girls were wont to stroll about the school grounds on clear days, as it was this morning, she even joined in a game of tag. Soon she was "It," and a wild chase led her abruptly through a small door which led down into the school basement, by way of a short flight of steps.

The contrast from the glare of the bright spring sunshine without to the semi-darkness of the basement blinded her for an instant or so, and she stood laughing and panting, pushing back her thick hair with a gesture inherited from her mother. Then a strange thing happened. Someone came swiftly forward out of the gloom of the basement to take her roughly by the shoulders. Someone's uneven breathing filled her ears!

A man's voice, hoarse, cracked, said, "Gail! Gail!"

Julie pulled herself away with a jerk. "My name isn't Gail!" she cried sharply. And the blindness clearing from her gaze, she stood staring up into a white, haggard face above her.

The man took a backward step and drew a vague hand across his brow. Then Julie saw with astonishment that he was Mr. Atterton, the janitor of the school. Her glance, too, was caught by the shabbiness and the grime of his coat sleeve, and she shivered with disgust, thinking of his hands upon her shoulders. "My name is Julie." She half turned away, adding, "But my mother's name is Gail."

"Your—mother's—name—is—Gail," repeated Mr. Atterton slowly. His eyes were fixed immovably upon

Julie's half-averted face. "And you look like your mother," he said positively.

Julie swung around again to look at him in surprise. "How do you know? You've never seen my mother, have you? Unless it was on the screen." Then certainty came to her. Of course! Therein lay the solution of Mr. Atterton's strange action. He must be an ardent screen fan of Gail Austin's—perhaps even a little daft about her!

"On the screen," mumbled Mr. Atterton. "No," he said suddenly and loudly. Then he said "Gail!" again and Julie, becoming uneasy over his odd behavior, turned toward the stairs. He offered no resistance to her going, only stood there staring straight before him with unseeing eyes, his lips moving silently. Like a man turned to stone, not seeming to breathe.

All that day, as Julie scrambled, somehow, through her lessons with a head that seemed five times its natural size and eyes that seemed to be full of prickles, she could not get the thought of Mr. Atterton out of her mind. All the rest of the school servants were colored. But Miss Luval, years ago, had thought it best to put the care of the school buildings into the care of a white man, and Mr. Atterton, appearing in answer to her letter of inquiry addressed to a reliable agency, had remained there ever since.

He had always been odd, had had the habit of mumbling to himself, and had slept in a little, clean, cell-like room adjacent to the furnace room. He had done his work excellently well, and Miss Luval had

grown to trust him more and more. Now, however, Julie knew she would be seriously displeased should she become aware of the strange manner in which he had accosted one of the pupils of Harwood Hall. So, as he had offered no offense, the girl decided to say nothing of the matter. Besides, her head ached and ached!

It ached so badly that, by the time the last study hour had ended, just before bedtime, in the big study hall, and Miss Luval was announcing something about a prize competition in literature, the subject to be given out later, Julie found herself almost stupefied by the pain.

After the pupils had been dismissed and were swarming out into the corridor, eagerly discussing the competition in their high, sweet, girlish voices, Julie remained at her desk, her head supported by her hands. It was Barbara, glancing around, as was her wont, to see where Julie was, who discovered her and flew back laughingly to arouse her. One glance down into the flushed face and dazed eyes of her room mate, however, stopped the laugh upon her lips.

"Julie!" Barbara bent over her, gave her a gentle shake. "Why don't you come?"

"It was that man!" said Julie. She looked up at Barbara with frightened eyes and suddenly hid her face in her arms. "I'm falling!" she muttered. "It is so far to the floor—over thirty feet!"

Now thoroughly alarmed, Barbara glanced around the big deserted room. Only Mr. Atterton, the janitor, was at the far end, closing the transoms and

the windows for the night. Barbara called softly to him, afraid to leave Julie for fear she might slip, unconscious, from her seat. But when he approached and Julie, glancing up, saw him, she uttered a shriek and shrank back against Barbara. "No! No!"

Mr. Atterton stood gazing down at her with an unmoved face. "Looks as though she had a fever," he said. "She acts delirious."

"Yes." Barbara's lips trembled. "Will you go for Miss Luval, please? And hurry!"

Then, as he left the room, she bent down to Julie and took the burning hands in her own steady ones. "It's all right, Julie dear! Here's Barbara! Hold fast to Barbara!"

Julie's strange, roving gaze glared up at her frightened room mate. "Barbara?" Julie shook her head. "I don't know you—but my head hurts!"

CHAPTER XVI

MORE MYSTERY

HOW is she this morning, Miss Cameron?"

The nurse closed the door to the Infirmary before she answered the anxious group of girls who had paused in the corridor outside of it.

"Oh, Julie's lots better to-day," she said then, smiling brightly at them. "Miss Stevens, her night nurse, left yesterday, and the doctor informed us this morning that she was well on the road to recovery. Oh, by the way, Barbara, do you want to go into the Infirmary for a very few moments?" Miss Cameron raised her voice slightly to hail a tall girl who was passing swiftly by. "Julie has asked for you, my dear."

Barbara paused at once, an eager smile lighting her dark face. "May I, *really!*" she exclaimed, in a tone of pleasure. And disappeared forthwith through the door Miss Cameron had tiptoed back to open for her. The rest of the girls moved away.

"I never *have* gotten over the disappointment of not having seen Gail Austin when she was here," began Carlisle to Renée in a low tone. Fatty, walking behind with Helen Morrison, a sweet-faced girl of

sixteen, uttered an exclamation, and Carlisle turned around. "What'd you say, Fatty?"

"I said," repeated Fatty bitterly, "wasn't it just blind, dumb luck that she had to arrive late at night, that Julie passed the crisis, and that her mother had to leave before any of us even caught a glimpse of her!"

Carlisle laughed. "Of course it was no hardship at all to Gail Austin," she returned, gently ironic, "that she had to leave to keep a contract for her company that meant thousands of dollars and not be here to take care of her only child! Good-night, Fatty, don't you suppose she wanted to stay more than you wanted to have her? It certainly wasn't her fault she had to leave!"

"Oh, I don't s'pose it was her fault," grumbled Fatty. "I s'pose she *did* want to stay with Julie! Just the same," she added reflectively, "I'm glad my mother's only the common garden variety of mother and not busy being everybody's favorite film actress!"

They all laughed, but Helen soon sobered.

"You know, I did see her for an instant, in passing the morning room that evening she arrived. I didn't know that Miss Luval had forbidden us to use that part of the house that night, in order that Mrs. Austin might have more privacy, so I came in by the front door after spending my 'leave' with the Winchells—Dad's friends here in town!"

"No—did you really see her? What was she like?" Three interested pairs of eyes fixed themselves on Helen's face as everyone came to a dead stop in the

sudden excitement. It was almost as though Helen had said she had shaken hands with George Washington or had kissed Marie Antionette—they could not have been more thrilled!

"You never told me!" began Fatty reproachfully, who was Helen's "special friend."

"Well," Helen's cheeks reddened, "I sort of felt as though it weren't fair to speak about it until we knew Julie was out of danger, for it seemed as though I had seen Gail Austin off her guard." Helen looked slowly around the puzzled faces, as they followed her into the morning room and sank upon window seat and into easy chairs. "You see," she continued gropingly, "I felt, too, as though it weren't fair to the rest of you that I had seen her, too, you understand?"

"No, we don't—but go on, anyway!" commanded Carlisle impatiently.

"All right, Julius Cæsar," returned Helen amiably.

"Why Julius Cæsar?" demanded Carlisle, crimsoning.

"Well, he was the bossiest person I could think of," commenced Helen laughingly. Then she saw the look in Carlisle's eyes and went on hastily, "But for goodness sake, stop interrupting me, or I won't tell you a *thing!*"

At this dire threat, Carlisle subsided upon her window seat.

"To begin with," said Helen, "I thought Gail Austin had one of the saddest faces I had ever seen!"

"Sad!" Fatty's tone was astonished. "Why, she

has everything you can think of—success, youth, and money!"

"Perhaps," said Renée, in a low voice, "perhaps, though, she has loneliness. I know that—with all the rest—success, youth and wealth—if you haven't love and companionship, nothing else really counts!"

There was a little silence. While none of the other girls knew much about Renée's lonely childhood, spent with that lonely old man, her grandfather, they did know, from little things she had said, how much she enjoyed the companionship and the young friendships she had found at school, and how much she dreaded vacation time, which meant going back to the big, beautiful, lonely New Orleans mansion. Fatty moved over to the little Creole girl and pulled her against her broad shoulder, for Fatty had one of the warmest hearts in the world, and she was always yearning over stray kittens and hungry-looking mongrels on the school walks.

"Don't cross bridges until you come to them—and don't think about being lonely, now!" she commanded gaily. "For," she quoted, " 'the time to be happy is now!' "

"That's what Miss Luval gave you, isn't it?" commented Helen idly. "Say it all, Fatty. I like it!"

" 'The time to be happy is now,' " repeated Fatty obediently. " 'The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others happy.' "

Again a little silence drifted over the bright morning room. Then Carlisle spoke in a softened voice,

the sort of voice the pupils always used in speaking of their beloved principal.

"Don't you like the way she gives us our 'staffs'? They say that in all the years she's been here at Harwood, she's never given the same motto to any two girls."

"I think I like her own motto almost the best," interrupted Helen. "She has it framed and hung over her desk. It's that one from the Knights of the Round Table."

"I don't think I ever noticed it," said Renée dubiously.

"Say it for her, Carlisle," commanded Helen.

Carlisle got slowly to her feet. There was nothing she liked better than to "speak a piece." Clasping her hands across her breast and raising her eyes, she looked so angelic that she might have been the Young Maid of Astolat, herself.

" 'Live pure,' " said Carlisle softly, very simply, " 'speak true, right wrong, follow the King, else wherefore born?' "

The other girls stared at her spellbound for an instant, so beautiful was the thought, so charming the look it brought to Carlisle's pretty face. Then Fatty drew a long breath.

"Gracious!" she ejaculated drolly. "I could almost see the white chargers prancing and the banners sweeping out in the breeze and the drawbridge being lowered over the moat, to say nothing of hearing the armor clink!"

They laughed. Then Helen sobered. "There's a

sad little story connected with that incident, though," she said. "Miss Nancy told us. Do you know it?"

"No, tell us!" begged Renée.

"It's very brief and, as I said, sad," answered Helen slowly. "Miss Luval long ago gave that motto to a little brother, who had been left in her charge when the mother died. The little brother grew up, fought in the World War, and was—killed! Well, his buddy sent the shell that killed him to Miss Luval, in mistaken kindness, with an explanatory note. She went almost frantic with grief, and at last journeyed East to Connecticut, where, aided by some dear old lady, she fought out her bitterness, returned to have the shell made into a vase, wherein each day a fresh rose is placed in loving memory of the little brother and to remind her that she is still, despite her personal sorrow, to 'live pure, speak true, right wrong, and follow the King!' "

The girls, more affected than they cared to show, sat silent for a moment. Then Renée looked around her.

"I hadn't realized we were in the morning room," she said, in a startled voice.

"What's the matter with the morning room?" asked Fatty curiously. "You act like you think it's ha'nted!"

"It is," returned Renée soberly. "Didn't you hear Lily-Belle this mawnin' tellin' about seein' the White Lady again last night—right here in the corridor outside this door?"

Fatty's eyes widened. Despite herself, she cast a

nervous look around her, which Carlisle caught and laughed at.

"Bosh, Renée!" said the latter roundly. "Servants' prattle! I heard her, and saw you drinking in that silly stuff! Stop actin' so superstitious!"

Renée looked at her stubbornly. "Lily-Belle," she continued, turning to Fatty and Helen, "swears she saw the White Lady not only on this floor; but on the next floor below, a second later—*and the White Lady did not go down the stairs with her either!*"

"What do you mean?" gasped Fatty.

"There are no other stairs except those Lily-Belle was on, in this part of the house," said Renée, in a low tone. *"How did the White Lady get from one floor to the next?"*

"Oh, mercy!" Fatty stumbled to her feet, made a swimming motion with her arms. "Let's get out of here! I don't like this part of the school—this Old House, anyway! Never did! Its rooms are sort of spooky, anyway, even without the White Lady!"

And as though her nervousness had been communicated to the others, all of them departed for the newer part of the school building rather hastily.

Barbara, meanwhile, bent over the narrow hospital bed upon which Julie lay.

"So good to see you," said Julie, weak tears coming into her eyes. "Babs, did I—dream—I saw my mother—one night?"

"No." Barbara patted the thin, white hand and shook her head smilingly. "Your mother was here, but she had to hurry on to California as soon as you

turned the corner. I wonder"—she stopped to look keenly at the young face smiling wanly at her from Julie's flat pillow—"I wonder if you are strong enough to hear a secret Miss Luval told me I might tell you?"

"Oh, yes!" begged Julie eagerly.

Barbara, no trace of curtness in her manner now, smiled at her. "The secret's this, Julie, and you must keep it until June. Your mother has been asked by Miss Luval, as one of Harwood's most famous alumnæ, to be a judge in our literary contest and to give out the prizes."

"Time's up, Barbara," said Miss Cameron, opening the door quietly and entering with a glass of orange juice in her hand.

It was the next day that Carlisle got her Great Idea for the literary contest. It has been privately agreed among the girls that Carlisle had the best chance of winning first prize, for she stood high in English, and now she hugged herself as she hastily jotted down some notes on the Idea. It was really clever and original, and Carlisle worked hard for almost an hour, sketching out an outline for the theme she would write later. When she had finished, she looked around her room for a place to conceal the notes.

As has been said before, Renée's and Carlisle's room was in a rear wing of the Old House itself. It was a quaint room, full of odd nooks and queer cupboards, with a low ceiling and a fireplace. The fireplace caught Carlisle's eye, now. There never had been a fire there—at least, since she could remember—and the opening had been scrubbed and scoured clean

of all soot. She went over and poked gleefully in the chimney—yes, that, too, was clean! And how her eyes sparkled when, just above the opening, her fingers encountered a place where a brick had fallen out! It made an ideal place for hidden notes. And now, somehow, it seemed vitally and romantically necessary that the notes be hidden!

She had barely withdrawn her hand when the door opened and Renée entered unexpectedly.

"'Lo, Renée," said Carlisle, without looking around. "Say, come on over and see the dandy hiding place I've found for my theme notes, here in the fireplace. Don't, for goodness sake, let me forget where I've put them."

Close upon Renée's heels was a tall, slim figure that stopped short at sight of Carlisle.

"I—I thought you said," stammered Barbara, "I—I—thought you said your room was—was empty, Renée!" With a reproachful glance, she prepared to back out hastily.

"Why, so I did," answered Renée self-consciously, glancing at the dark face Carlisle turned upon them. "But, lawsy, you-all doan have to go jes' 'cause Ca'lisle happens to be heah! She won't eat you!"

"Oh, no, no! I'll see you later, Renée!" And Barbara slipped away.

Renée came over and looked at her room mate frowningly. "I call it a shame, Ca'lisle," she exclaimed, with unusual heat. "You-all have actually made that girl afraid of you, I do believe. Why can't you be nice to her?"

Carlisle raised her eyebrows. "I'm glad 'that girl' shows the proper attitude toward me—after making me almost miss out on any chance for the scholarship!" she returned levelly. "I'll never forgive her the demerits."

Renée gazed at her with sober eyes. "You-all suah do hold a grudge, don't you, Ca'lisle," she said at last. "A scholarship is a wonderful thing to win, but not at the price you-all are making yo'self and po' Barbara pay!"

But Carlisle retreated into stubborn silence. What did Renée, with her money and her lack of responsibility, know of the meaning of winning that scholarship? It might mean honor and the glory of achievement to any other girl in the school; but it meant, Carlisle told herself bitterly, about the only chance she had of continuing her education at Harwood, for she knew that much of the money her mother had obtained from selling the lot she had inherited from Carlisle's grandfather had been spent.

A knock upon the door Barbara had closed behind her broke a little, stiff silence between the two room mates presently.

"Miss Luval send fo' you-all," said the trim little colored maid, Lily-Belle, when Renée flung the door open.

"Me?" Renée stared at her. "Lawsy," she murmured, when Lily-Belle had nodded and hurried away, "what do you s'pose Ah've done, now, Ca'lisle?"

Whenever Renée was especially worried or excited, her Southern accent appeared in her speech, like ginger

ale bubbles rising to the surface when the bottle is uncorked.

"Maybe it's a visitor." But even as she suggested this, Carlisle was aware of its absurdity. Renée, however, had wonderingly left the room, and now Carlisle turned back to gaze with doubtful eyes at the fireplace. Should she change the hiding place of those notes? But Barbara was probably trustworthy, she told herself with curling lips, probably more stupid than anything else, so the precious notes would be safe even if the other girl had seen their hiding place! Besides, there was the tea bell! And with that same carelessness which had once caused her mother an uncomfortable half hour entertaining Kitty and Margaret because Carlisle's room had not been made orderly enough in which to receive them, Carlisle now dashed away.

Renée, meanwhile, was tapping timidly upon Miss Luval's office door.

"Did you-all send fo' me?" she asked shyly, when the door opened. Then her gaze went past Miss Luval's smiling face to a tall, thin, elderly figure upon the opposite side of the room. "Why—why—Mr. Chartres, how did you-all evah git heah?" she stammered.

"By train," he answered precisely, shaking hands. "I've come," he told her hesitantly—for after all, what did he, an old bachelor, know about little girls?—"I've come, my dear, to take you out to dinner. With," he added hastily, sending a bow in that lady's direction, "with Miss Luval's permission."

He had, it seemed, hit upon exactly the right approach to Renee's heart! She gave a little gasp of delight and looked up at him with shining eyes. And then, before he knew it, a sweet, light, butterfly kiss had been placed upon Mr. Chartres's elderly, leathery cheek. He looked rather startled; but he liked it. Oh, my, yes, he liked it!

"Oh," breathed Renée rapturously, "aren't you deah!"

As she dropped a curtsey to Miss Luval and excitedly departed to don her party clothes, Mr. Chartres turned agitatedly to Miss Luval. "She—she acts as though she were hungry," he said anxiously.

Miss Luval smiled wisely. "It's not the dinner she's excited about. It's having someone caring enough to come and ask her out to dinner." The principal paused. "She's been a lonely little child, I imagine, Mr. Chartres," she sighed. "It's been quite like watching a flower respond to sunshine after being in the dark, to watch Renée enjoy her new friendships here."

"I know," answered Mr. Chartres. Suddenly, he stepped closer to Miss Luval. "You—you are the sunshine, Alicia," he said tremulously. And for a moment they were both silent, as their thoughts went back to that time many years ago when Alicia Luval and her invalid mother had spent a winter in New Orleans, when she had had to say "no" to a certain question Mr. Chartres had asked her, because duty and love had not seemed to march together.

After Renée and her elderly escort had departed

happily together, Miss Luval stood for a moment in contemplation of that little vase, beneath a photograph of a bright-faced lad in uniform. A smile came into her eyes as she noticed the loveliness of the rose in the vase; but the little sigh she breathed was half sad, wholly patient. Then she turned briskly away, and when she went softly across the corridor to tap upon her sister's door, her face wore her habitual sweet smile.

Half an hour later, Carlisle and Fatty were following Miss Nancy into a drug store in town.

"Who'd ever thought a little while ago we'd 'a' been comin' in here for ice cream!" whispered the latter, with a luxurious sigh, as they seated themselves at a little round table and Miss Nancy was busy with the menu card.

"Lucky for us we happened to be passing Miss Nancy's door at the moment Miss Luval was asking her to go on that errand for her," whispered back Carlisle. "I shook in my shoes, when Miss Nancy mentioned our going, for those demerits Old Constitution gave me seemed to hang before me like a red flag. But I guess Miss Luval decided it was so near our next report card, she'd be lenient. Believe me, I've worked hard this month, and I'm sure I'll be an 'honor girl' next!"

Miss Nancy rose abruptly. "Will you wait here, chickies," she inquired, "while I give this prescription to Mr. Smith? Go ahead and order," she added, noticing the little white-jacketed clerk's approach. "Mine is plain vanilla!"

"Think of ordering plain vanilla," said Fatty in an awed tone, when Miss Nancy had walked away and the little clerk stood waiting, "when you could get a chocolate-pineapple-sundae with nuts and whipped cream, instead! Mine's that!" she added, to the clerk.

When their order had been fulfilled and the confections stood waiting Miss Nancy's return, Fatty, feeling that it took actual brute strength to keep her hand from picking up the little spoon beside her dish, began speaking idly.

"You mentioned being an honor girl next month," she said. "I know one girl and maybe two who won't be if they don't watch their steps."

"Who?" asked Carlisle, interestedly.

"Kitty Evans and Margaret Dale," answered Fatty.

"Why?" Carlisle looked at her keenly, wondering how much Fatty knew. "They are from my home town, you know," she added. "Funny, I don't see half as much of them here as I used to at home."

"That's because they belong to that older clique," answered Fatty, trying not to glance too longingly down at her melting ice cream. "It's a good thing you don't see much of 'em, because they're due for trouble."

"Why?" asked Carlisle again.

"Well," Fatty lowered her voice, after a cautious glance around, "they've been using their honor privileges to meet cadets from the military academy on the sly."

"No!" Carlisle thought of the note she had seen passed in church.

"Yep," nodded Fatty. "I've heard it from a couple of other 'honor girls' several times, and it won't be long before Miss Luval finds out and—— Gracious, I didn't see you, Miss Nancy!"

"It takes so long, here, to put a prescription through," fussed Miss Nancy as she sat down and picked up her spoon. Her glance rested upon the untouched plates before her young guests. "Mercy, you poor children, I meant to tell you to go ahead!" she said remorsefully.

"Nev' mind," mumbled Fatty, falling to ravenously, "'tain't *all* melted!" And she looked up in bland surprise at Miss Nancy's appreciative chuckle.

After they had finished their ice cream and Miss Nancy had procured her medicine, she took them through the town center as a special treat, for the routine of school walks never led that way, and now both erstwhile 'honor girls' begged for the privilege of once more looking into shop windows. It was as they passed the one motion-picture theater that Carlisle almost bumped into a shabby figure lingering before a billboard placed in front of the theater lobby.

"Oh, Mr. Atterton," she exclaimed, recognizing him, "I beg your pardon!"

"Not at all!" said the school janitor, raising his hat courteously as he moved away. Suddenly, as they gazed after him, he seemed not to be Mr. Atterton, the school janitor, but a gentleman, a man of culture—his gesture in raising his hat, his poise as he turned

away, the lift of his head. But even as they stared, he slipped back once more, back into the weary, middle-aged man they knew. His walk became a shamble, his shoulders drooped. They could hear him mumble as he proceeded along the street.

Carlisle recalled Miss Nancy's attention by an excited exclamation. "He was looking at Gail Austin's picture!" she giggled. "Funny, what queer people become the worst 'fans'!"

Late that evening, Carlisle woke from a queer, restless dream. A glance at Renée's bed showed that she had not yet come in, for it was empty.

"Strange!" said Carlisle to herself. "Wonder what time it is?"

But she could not see her wrist watch, and, impatiently, she slipped out of bed and opened her bedroom door, that she might obtain light from the corridor, where a night light was always burning. To her amazement, darkness met her. The night light was out!

The next instant, Carlisle felt a strange, uncanny sensation slide up and down her spine. Coming toward her down the corridor, outlined against a dim light burning at the other end, was a vague, white figure. It seemed to float along! Then, even as she stared in horror, *the figure disappeared!*

Her hand clapped over her mouth to stifle a scream, Carlisle stood gazing unbelievingly. Her sturdy common sense refused to let her believe that the White Lady was actually walking abroad. But where had that white figure gone?

The next instant a scream rang out from the floor below, and Renée, chalky faced, came dashing up the stairs, her pretty evening cape over her arm and tripping her every other step. She caught sight of Carlisle standing in the doorway and flew toward her. Then, as doors opened all along the corridor and ghostly figures came hurrying from every direction, Renée stood shuddering in her room mate's arms.

"The White Lady! I saw her downstairs!" she half sobbed.

Carlisle, soothing her, felt again that queer sensation up and down her spine. The White Lady had not used the stairs to get to the floor below, for they were beyond Carlisle's door, at the other end of the corridor. And the White Lady had not passed by her door!

CHAPTER XVII

AN ELOPEMENT AND WHAT HAPPENED

RENEE! Renée!" laughed Miss Nancy gently. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

It was the next morning during recess, and Miss Nancy had dropped in upon the girls to find them, despite their fright of the night before, enjoying a huge box of candy Mr. Chartres had sent his little ward before departing for home.

"Well, sort of," admitted Renée, returning the laugh rather dubiously, however. "But, you know, the queer paht of it is, though, Ca'lisle, heah, saw the White Lady, too!"

Miss Nancy turned her amused eyes upon Carlisle's troubled face. "Not our little sensible Mid-Westerner!" she cried. "My dear, won't you admit you must have been half asleep and dreaming?"

"Always," returned Carlisle, "I've laughed at the silly people who believed in this story of the White Lady! Really, I have, Miss Nancy! I've maintained, right along, that it could always be explained—its appearance, I mean. Each time, before, when I thought I had seen it, some natural explanation has always been forthcoming. But this time!" The girl looked up soberly. "There really seems to be no ex-

planation. I saw this—this white figure, Miss Nancy, go past my door, in the direction where you and I know *there are no stairs!* The next moment, Renée screamed *from the floor below* and came running up, swearing she had seen the White Lady down there. Now, how did the White Lady—or the person who is frightening everyone as the White Lady, *get down to that floor when there were no stairs?"*

"My dear child," answered Miss Nancy skeptically, "you had just been wakened out of a sound sleep—you could have imagined anything. Renée, here, according to Dr. Bradbury, is a highly strung, nervous girl who—you'll pardon me for saying so, dear—might even be given to hallucinations, though, of course, I'm not saying that she is!" Renée looked insulted. "Now, don't get silly notions in your head, Renée, for that is not at all probable. But the point is this—you *must* control your imagination! As Carlisle says, some natural explanation of this foolish scare has always been forthcoming—and doubtless will be, this time. I——"

She was interrupted by a cool voice from the doorway. "But the strange part of it is," said Kitty Evans smilingly, "that I saw the White Lady too, last night!"

Three startled faces looked toward her at once, although Miss Nancy's expression soon changed to one of mirth, again. Renée, however, jumped to her feet and came forward to extend her candy invitingly, as to a fellow sufferer.

"After that, you-all need a caramel," she said.

"Yes," repeated Kitty Evans, nodding her thanks as she bit into the candy she had selected, "I was up, closing the window in our room—it got cold toward midnight—or at least, it seemed like midnight—and I saw the White Lady pass the door I opened afterward for ventilation. I 'bout scared Peggy to death by grabbing her and waking her out of a sound sleep! I tell you," she looked at Miss Nancy, "it's getting serious! There must be something to that old legend, after all!"

"Nonsense!" said Miss Nancy briskly. "There isn't a thing to it! Now, I must trust you girls to keep silence about this. Miss Luval does *not* want anything so foolish spread among the younger girls and the servants!" She looked at them appealingly, and the three girls promised not to talk about the matter. But as Kitty moved out of the room beside Renée and Miss Nancy, Carlisle remained where she was, looking after her frowningly. Somehow, Kitty's story had not rung true—and what nerve she showed, coming right into the room of the girl she had so meanly treated! For Carlisle was sure Kitty had not only invited one of the cadets to the masquerade and let him in through the stage entrance in the study hall; but had used her, Carlisle, as a shield, even changing the clean sheet upon the latter's chair for her own muddy, torn one! Yet what could be her object in deliberately giving false information?

Kitty did not keep her promise to Miss Nancy, either, for, despite Carlisle's and Renée's honorable silence, the ghost scare was revived again and again.

each time following Kitty's appearance in a wide-eyed, solemn-faced, whispering group of pupils, generally younger girls. Like the plague, nervousness spread once more until even the servants went about whispering and casting terrified glances over their shoulders. And no one, save Miss Dempsey, would go past "Miss Melissa's room" alone after nightfall! Lily-Belle once more reported having seen the White Lady, this time going directly to Miss Luval with her story.

"Ah tell you-all, Miss Alicia, Ah did see dat ghostes suah as shootin'! Ah was jes' on mah way to baid—'Rastus and me'd been down to town and 'Rastus, he'd gone out to de men's qua'tahs in de garage an' Ah seen dat ghostes come walkin' outa dat do'——"

"Just a moment, Lily-Belle." Miss Luval checked the girl. "What floor were you on at that time? What room or what door do you mean?"

"Ah'm tellin' you-all!" said Lily-Belle reproachfully, and her mistress settled back with a sigh. As well try to check the torrents of Niagara as to cut short this opportunity for Lily-Belle to embellish bare facts! "So Ah was jes' climbin' to mah room," pursued Lily-Belle, with a terrified enjoyment, "Ah was——"

"But——"

"Now, ef you-all'd jes' let me tell you, Miss Alicia——"

"But don't you see, Lily-Belle, you're not telling me *anything!*" Miss Luval's patience finally gave

out. "Now, where, exactly, were you when this—this 'ghost' appeared?"

"Ah'm tellin' you-all," repeated Lily-Belle stubbornly. "Ah was almost to Miss Melissa's do' and——"

"Ah, now we're getting along!" Miss Luval leaned forward and thoughtfully drew a list toward her. "Fourth floor—Miss Dempsey, Miss Batton—that guest room—why does everyone still call it 'Miss Melissa's room'?—the Infirmary, Miss Cameron's sitting room, and the servants quarters in the South Wing." She hastily ran over the list, then sat tapping her pencil against her teeth as she thought matters over, while Lily-Belle rambled on and on.

"All right, Lily-Belle." Miss Luval interrupted her at last, nodding at her in dismissal. "Thank you for telling me. Don't tell anyone else—it's foolish to talk about it! And let me know if anything further occurs—not," she added hastily, as Lily-Belle rolled her eyes, "that anything *will!*"

When the colored girl had withdrawn, Miss Luval sighed. "Some girl playing a youthful prank," she thought, with a rueful frown. "But such a time to select, with all the strain of the competition looming near! I'm almost half sorry," she sighed again, "that we decided to have the competition!"

She was still anxiously pondering the matter when a knock sounded upon her "office" door. "Come in," she called. "Ah, good-morning, Mr. Atterton!" She looked up at him inquiringly.

"G'morning, Miss Luval!" Furtively, the janitor

slipped across the threshold. "I wanted to see you about those supports holding that little balcony outside the guest room."

"Yes?"

"They're—they're rotting, Miss Luval. I have no doubt but what they are as old as the original building, which dates back many, many years, as you know. These supports should be taken care of, as they are dangerous, for the balcony might give way at any time beneath weight."

"I see," nodded Miss Luval briskly. "I'll telephone Garrison & White at once and have them send up a carpenter to give an estimate on the job."

But, as it happened, Miss Luval forgot about telephoning, and the balcony seemed to sag more and more as the spring days went by, while Mr. Atterton would gaze at it worriedly every time he passed beneath it.

A thin little Julie came back at last to room with Barbara. For awhile Miss Luval talked of sending her to her mother; but the long trip West, where Gail Austin was "on location" seemed inadvisable for a convalescent, and so Julie and Barbara settled down once more in happy companionship, the former placed upon a light schedule of school work. Despite her easy studies, however, the girl regained her health but slowly, spending many wakeful hours at night when she should have been sleeping, tormented by the nerves she was surprised to find she possessed. She noticed that Barbara slept uneasily, also, tossing upon her narrow bed next to Julie's, groaning at

times and muttering of the coming literary competition. Julie rallied her about it one day.

"You don't want to take it so seriously, Babs dear!" she exclaimed in remonstrance.

"Take what seriously?" asked Barbara, in her curt voice.

"Why, you talk of nothing but that competition, night after night. In your sleep, I mean!" explained Julie.

"That's queer," responded Barbara. "I don't think of it much during the day."

"I'm glad I'm not bright," laughed Julie. "I just know I won't get the prize, even with Moth's fond hopes to buoy me up, so I never think about it!"

Barbara reached across the study table and rumpled her room mate's yellow curls affectionately. "You've been looking better these last few days," she said. "I hope you'll be all well by the time your mother arrives! Julie," she paused, blurted it out, "do you think that that wetting you had during spring vacation had anything to do with your illness? That time I pushed you in, remember?"

Julie looked at her quickly, shook her head emphatically. "Of course not, Babs!" she returned. "You've been worrying about that? I s'pose you have been blaming your poor old self right along for this whole flapdoodle business of mine, eh?"

"Well," Barbara smiled her serious smile, "you can't deny I had something to do with your getting soaked, that day. If I hadn't leaned on you——"

"Once for all," said Julie solemnly, "I tell you you

did *not* push me! I flopped in my own silly self! So never refer to that again, Barbara Gainsworth! As for this other illness—I don't think it had anything to do with my soaking that day. It just happened! Now, promise not to worry any more about *your* being to blame for it!"

"All right, I promise!" laughed Barbara. But that night Julie found her with her feet upon the floor, sitting upon the edge of her bed, staring ahead of her with strange, set gaze.

"Barbara!" Julie called to her sharply. "What's the matter?"

"Julie! Julie!" muttered Barbara. She sighed, not moving. "Poor Julie! I—I—didn't mean to, you know!"

"Here—wake up! I do believe you're fast asleep!" Julie couldn't help but giggle, and Barbara turned, climbed into bed. Just as Julie was drifting off to sleep again, however, she heard her room mate mutter. "That competition—it's good!"

But by this time everyone was talking and thinking more or less about the literary competition, so that it was no small wonder it was upon Barbara's mind, especially as she ranked high, as did Carlisle, in her English theme work. Indeed, as a matter of conversation, the contest was almost displacing the White Lady. Girls were seen scribbling gravely upon scratch pads which, if anyone approached, they would stuff hastily into their sweater pockets. There were to be three prizes—the first consisting of the munificent sum of one hundred dollars, the second fifty, and

the third twenty-five. Miss Luval had been a little dubious about offering cash prizes; but she explained in Assembly, one morning, that an anonymous donor was giving the prizes and had insisted upon those amounts.

Carlisle, sauntering out of the study hall after Assembly that day, walked with absent gaze. What *couldn't* she do with one hundred dollars!

"I could pay Mother back—a little!" she thought. "Why, she could use it to take a little rest—go up to Spirit Lake with Bobbie for a week, maybe, during hot weather!"

"Don't spend it all at once, Ca'lisle!" said a voice dryly behind her, at this point. And Carlisle, glancing back laughingly, saw Renée hurrying to catch up to her.

"I was just planning to send Mother and Bobbie away for a week on that first prize," she told her lazily. "Not that Mother will go—she's so unselfish!"

Renée looked at her sideways. "After hearing those notes you read to me the other night," she said, suddenly sober, "I have no doubt at all but that you *will* get first prize, Ca'lisle!"

Carlisle commenced to laugh again, then she checked herself to explain. "Why, you poor little simpleton, I was only fooling!"

"I wasn't foolin'!" said Renée seriously. "Your notes were—wonderful, I thought. If you can only write a theme as good as the notes! What's that?"

she added, as Carlisle stopped, outside a classroom door, to retrieve something from the floor.

"It's only a piece of paper," began Carlisle. She stopped. "Why," her tone changed as she opened the folded paper and her eye caught the import of the writing upon it, "it's a—a note, addressed to Kitty Evans!"

"Well, lawsy!" exclaimed Renée, in a scandalized tone. "What're you-all doin', Ca'lisle, a-standin' there readin' Kitty Evans's note!"

Carlisle looked up, then she stepped close to her room mate and hissed in her ear, "Keep still, will you! I'll meet you out by that old tree—halfway up the hill out in back, after school's out this morning!"

Needless to say, Renée kept the appointment. Indeed, she ran back down the hill to meet Carlisle, having reached their rendezvous first.

"Now, fo' heaven's sake!" she gasped. "Tell me, quick, Ca'lisle! I nevah, in all mah bawn days, spent such a mawnin'!"

"Well," began Carlisle obligingly, "It's a note from one of the cadets over at the military academy—probably the same one she's been foolin' with all winter—making a date with Kitty *to elope with him to-night!*"

"To elope with him to-night!" Renée stared. "Ca'lisle Mahtin, eithah you-all are crazy or else I am! Why, Kitty Evans is only fifteen, isn't she!"

"Must be you, then, who's crazy, because I'm not!" returned Carlisle unmoved. "And Kitty's sixteen, I think. However, see here, if you won't believe me!" And she spread out the note so that Renée could verify

her information. Both girls were rather pale when Carlisle folded the foolish note into a small square and replaced it in her pocket.

"What're you-all goin' to do, Ca'lisle?" asked Renée, in an awed voice.

"I don't know," answered Carlisle. "I s'pose I should report it to Miss Luval and let her take care of the whole thing. Still, I hate to bother her about it—for it might be just a joke on us. Someone may have placed that note there on the floor on purpose, you know, waiting for us to come along. It seems sorta queer that Kitty wouldn't take better care of it. Yet, on the other hand, maybe she did lose the note and——" Carlisle paused.

"On the othah hand—what?" asked Renée impatiently.

"Well, on the other hand, maybe Kitty's been the White Lady all this time—sort of paving the way to escape in that disguise if she wanted to, ever!" said Carlisle slowly.

"Oh, Ca'lisle!" Renée's eyes grew round. "Do you-all suppose——"

"I shouldn't wonder at all!" said Carlisle, growing more certain as Renée kept on staring. "Remember that other morning when Kitty happened into our room so apropos, when Miss Nancy was there talking about the White Lady? She must have been eavesdropping, sort of! And you know yourself, Renée, how the little kids are always talking about the White Lady after Kitty's been near them! Now, I sort of think it's our duty to keep Kitty from disgracing Har-

wood—as she will, if she elopes with this silly boy from the academy! Maybe we could get Fatty to help us keep watch to-night and——"

"Lawsy, wouldn't that be fun!" shuddered Renée enjoyably. "I mean," she corrected herself hastily at Carlisle's severe look, "I mean, for the honah of Harwood, we really *ought* to stop Kitty, don't you know!" And she went along quite meekly as Carlisle turned, with the air of a thoughtful Napoleon, and led the way back to luncheon.

Not long after the last gong had rung that night and quiet had settled down over Harwood Hall, three dark-clad figures might have been seen tiptoeing from Fatty's room down the corridor.

"Where are yuh goin' to hide?" asked one figure, in a stage whisper.

Leading the way toward the Old House from the South Wing, the first figure stopped so abruptly at the whisper that there was a combined gasp, for first one, then the other, of the two following figures, ran into her.

"Why'nt you give a signal when you're going to stop short like that?" complained the last figure aggrievedly. "Put out your hand or something! Golly-gosh—I bumped into Renée so hard I knocked all the breath right out of me and——"

"Now, see here, Fatty Smith, if you can't keep more quiet, you go right back to bed! Want the whole school in on this?" said the leader sternly.

"What're you pickin' on me f'r?" answered the last

figure dolefully. "I haven't done anything! I only said——"

"Well, say it to-morrow!" retorted the leader. "Now, see here!" Her tone gathered briskness. "Let's hide in here!"

"In the morning room?" Fatty's whisper was one of the startled protest. "I don't like this morning room at night! It's always about here—or else up near 'Miss Melissa's room' that that White Lady always seen and——"

"Don't be silly!"

"Well, Ah don't like this mawnin' room, eithah, Ca'lisle!" Renée also looked around her nervously, her Southern accent, as usual, very evident in her excitement. "It's all right in the mawnin', with the sun a-shinin' through those curtains! But it's the ghostliest place at night, Ca'lisle!"

"Oh, shucks!" Carlisle's whisper was of one who prays for patience. "I selected this spot because I knew Kitty'd come this way—or rather, so that we could watch her, whichever way she took, through the Old House or else down the stairs to the study hall and through that stage exit, there. But if you two poor boobs are *afraid*——! Where do you want to wait?"

"Well, don't get so huffy about it!" complained Fatty bitterly. "You're the crossest captain I ever saw and——"

"Where do you want to wait?" Carlisle's whisper was inexorable.

"Why—ee, any place so long as 'tain't here, Car-

lisle." Fatty's whisper was carefully polite. "Any place so long's 'tain't this morning room!"

"All right, come along, then!" And nipping about, Carlisle crept off into the dimness of the new wing toward Kitty's and Margaret Dale's room, Fatty and Renée scuffling along in their bedroom slippers after her. They all brought up with a sudden start in a corner where a chimney projected into the hall a foot or two, and Renée felt her heart jump as Carlisle grasped her hand.

"Sh!" whispered Carlisle. *"What's that?"*

They peered fearfully around the corner of the chimney. "Look—looks like the *White Lady!"* muttered Fatty, her teeth commencing to chatter. "Gollygosh, I—I—wish—I wish I'd worn a heavy bathrobe!"

"Bosh, you're only scared!" whispered back Carlisle steadily. "I'll bet it's Kitty! Wait until she gets near enough, then grab her! But don't let her scream! If she does, it will be all up with everything—everybody'll get a demerit!"

"Ah—Ah wish *Ah* was asleep!" moaned Renée, her terrified gaze upon the approaching figure which, in fact, was ghostly enough to frighten anyone.

On, on it came! The three girls felt as though they must suffocate and Carlisle had a moment's serious anxiety when she remembered what Dr. Bradbury told her about Renée. "But, goodness—we're all together here! No one can get really hurt!" she thought impatiently. "All right, Renée?" she asked,

in a low whisper, though, and received a convulsive little poke in answer.

At last Carlisle gave a lithe spring forward, and the White Lady, if White Lady she was, stopped abruptly. Then Renée and Fatty, seeing that Carlisle had actually halted the white-clad form, became very busy, all at once. A swift jerk at the figure's headgear, and Fatty found herself with a pillow case in her hand. A snatch, and Renée discovered that she had snatched off a sheet, revealing, now that their eyes were accustomed to the dimness of the corridor, Kitty Evans, fully clad in hat and coat, with a suitcase in her hand, staring at them half terrified, wholly furious!

"What does this mean!" Kitty whispered it at last. "How dare you wait here to scare me like this! Let me pass!"

"How dare you try to hurt the honor of Harwood by eloping like—like a sneak?" retorted Carlisle, also in a whisper.

"How do you know I'm eloping?" asked Kitty, in a defiant whisper.

"Well, you don't generally go to bed carrying a suitcase, do you?" broke in Fatty bluntly.

"Better get back to bed quietly, now, Kitty," advised Carlisle, "or——"

"Or what?" asked Kitty belligerently.

"Or we'll see that you go!" said Fatty, moving forward ponderously.

In spite of herself, Kitty moved back a step. "You

make me sick!" she stormed, with a furiousness none the less real for being beneath her breath.

"You make *us* sick, trying to pull a thing like this!" said Carlisle bitterly. "So it's been you all this time, making believe you were the White Lady and scaring the whole school! I——"

She stopped, all at once, at the look on Kitty's face. She had to, it was an expression of such utter horror. And as she turned instinctively to gaze in the direction Kitty was facing—toward the entrance of the corridor into the Old House—the others turned, too. Then, for an instant, no one moved. For far down the corridor, near the morning room, it seemed to them a vague, white figure floated, which, as they stared, *disappeared!* It was exactly like rubbing a chalked figure from a blackboard. First it was there! Then it wasn't!

But an instant after that there was a terrible scream *from the floor below!*

At once the corridor seemed to be in an uproar. Carlisle, dragging Renée back toward their room, ran full into a tall, stout figure in a flannel nightgown.

"Young ladies! Young la—*dees,* what does this mean!"

It was Mrs. Lawtry. Carlisle stopped, with a despairing gesture. But when she would have spoken, Mrs. Lawtry sailed past her and pounced upon Fatty, who, oddly enough, seemed to be struggling all at once with Kitty and the suitcase. At Mrs. Lawtry's approach, however, they resolved into two distinct

figures once more, plus a suitcase, and Fatty drew aside to fold her arms.

"You'd better watch that girl! She'll get away, yet!" she advised gaspingly. "Just—just now—she tried to beat it!"

"Susan, what do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Lawtry. Her tone was full of moral satisfaction, as though, always being on her guard, she had at last found something worthwhile to report. "No, stay!" she said suddenly. "You shall all go to Miss Luval at once!"

"At once!" gasped Renée. "Wake her up now, Mrs. Lawtry!"

"Why not?" retorted Mrs. Lawtry, with tightening lips. "You'd better go down and quiet that girl with hysteria," she added to Miss Frost, who had crept shiveringly out of her room.

"Don't you think Miss Atkinson will take care of her?" answered the younger teacher, plainly not relishing the idea of descending the dark stairs alone.

"You had better go!" repeated Mrs. Lawtry firmly. "Now," she continued, when Miss Frost had reluctantly departed, "come with me! What's this—one of my sheets—and one of my pillow cases? Ha, that's the one I have missed for quite awhile! Young lay—dees, there is a great deal here to explain!" And marshaling the four pale-faced girls before her like criminals, she got them to Miss Luval's bedroom and knocked thunderingly upon the door. There was a murmur of surprise from inside the room, the sound

of someone hurriedly arising from bed, and Miss Luval threw open the door.

"Come in," she said quietly, holding up her hand as Mrs. Lawtry started to speak. "Now," she said, snapping on the electric light and turning to regard them all with shadowed eyes, "please tell me what has happened, without waking Miss Nancy, who has just fallen asleep in the next room, after one of her bad headaches!"

Somehow, the sorry little story was told, and Mrs. Lawtry, an air of triumph ill-concealed upon her face, stood waiting for the principal to speak.

"I am sorry you saw fit to bring the girls here tonight," said Miss Luval quietly, at last. "That will do, Mrs. Lawtry," she added, as the teacher opened her mouth indignantly. And though Miss Luval was small and rather slight and the other lady very large, there was an air of such perfect dignity about her that Mrs. Lawtry found herself departing without having said one of the things she had meant to say.

"Now, girls, will you all, please, very quietly go back to bed?" went on Miss Luval. She stood motionless as they filed out obediently; but Carlisle, glancing back, somehow caught a little of the sadness and the trouble that underlay that quiet manner, knew, somehow, that Kitty Evans had spoiled the year at Harwood Hall for herself, knew that expulsion was going to follow the foolish escapade of the motherless girl. And all at once, as the door into Miss Luval's room closed behind her, *Carlisle Martin wanted to see her mother!* To tell her, perhaps incoherently,

how much she really loved her, how much, now, she appreciated the mother's tender care and loving guidance that she had given the little only daughter!

"Why, I *couldn't* have done anything so silly as to plan an elopement!" thought Carlisle, going on loving her mother. "I would have known how idiotic it was, just because Mother—well, just because my mother has taken care of me. Poor Kitty! Poor Mr. Evans! He couldn't give Kitty, with all his money and his love, what my mother has given me! And I never realized it before! Oh, I'm going to show Mother! I'm going to be different when I get home!"

It was a pale, rather heavy-eyed trio who gathered in Carlisle's room the next day. Fatty spoke first, settling herself upon Renée's bed with a loud sigh—the melancholy of which was spoiled by the motion of her jaws as she chewed upon one of the caramels she had always concealed about her.

"Well, our first attempt to rival old Sherlock wasn't so good, was it?" she murmured, looking sidelong at the other two. Carlisle raised her head indignantly and swung around from her desk.

"What d'ye mean—not so good?" she demanded.

"Why—why, nothing!" stammered Fatty placatingly. "I only meant—well, we didn't find out who the White Lady was, did we?"

"Oh, that!" Carlisle shook her head somberly. "I thought you meant the Kitty Evans episode. You know, girls, I realize, now, we shouldn't have butted in on that—I should have taken that note directly to Miss Luval—for everything would have worked out

better if we hadn't tried to stop Kitty ourselves. Miss Luval called me to her office this afternoon," Carlisle spoke absently. "Gave me my honor-girl privileges, for Kitty confessed that she *had* changed the sheet and pillow case on my chair, after all, the morning after the masquerade!"

"Oh, Ca'lisle, how splendid!" Both Fatty and Renée exclaimed. And the latter added. "I told you murdah would out, Ca'lisle!"

"Yes—but I hate to climb over the other fellow's down-trodden body!" answered Carlisle listlessly. "I'm awfully sorry for poor Mr. Evans—yes, and for Kitty, too! She left on the noon train, you know."

"I don't think you have anything to regret," said Renée steadily. "You all played the game, Ca'lisle, with Kitty—it was jes' her own foolishness that spoiled everything for her. And as fo' Mr. Evans—he'd have felt the disgrace far mo' if Kitty had gotten mah'ied like that!"

Fatty chewed violently for a moment or so. "No, you have nothing to regret, Carlisle," she said, then. "You earned those honor-girl privileges, and it was only right they should be given to you. As for the Kitty episode—well, I s'pose we should have told Miss Luval about that note; but Kitty was just one of those sillies who are bound to do some fool thing sooner or later. And she wasn't square about it—with you, or trying to scare the younger girls!"

"But—who *is* the White Lady?" pondered Carlisle. "That's the point—who *is* the White Lady?"

"How do you-all know it *is* a 'who'?" asked Renée with a little shudder. And there was a sober silence.

"Let's—let's—stay up some night and solve the mystery!" proposed Fatty.

Renée eyed her aghast. "You-all really mean that, Fatty?"

"No, I don't!" said Fatty, backing out hastily. "I don't mean it at all! If you ever see me parading around after the 'lights out' bell after this, you can report me to Miss Luval as being a candidate for any asylum you choose!"

"Hear! Hear!" cried a voice, as the door opened and Julie drifted in, like a jonquil all in yellow. "Hello, sinners!"

They all welcomed her cordially, for they still felt as though Julie had come back to them after a long and perilous journey, as perhaps she had. When Fatty had tenderly escorted her to the big chair she had been occupying herself, and Renée ran for a pillow to place behind her back, and Carlisle had adjusted the windows that no draft might blow upon the invalid, Julie grinned up at them.

"Now I'll tell you what I heard as I waited outside the door to Miss Luval's office just now—the door being open," she said amiably.

"Go on!" begged the others.

"You're not any of you going to get any demerits for your escapade last night, because Old Constitution pleaded that you not be given them. She's really the one who asked first that Carlisle's 'honor girl' privileges be given to her, too—did you know that?"

There was a chorus of exclamations. Then Fatty made a dash for the door.

"Where are you-all goin', Fatty?" demanded Renée.

"I'm going to give that ancient woman a kiss and ask her pardon for all the hard things I've been thinking of her!" giggled Fatty.

They all laughed as she vanished. "Of course she won't do anything of the kind! Fatty's the most bashful person in the world when it comes to showing affection. And imagine Old Constitution's face if she did go up to her and kiss her!" said Carlisle.

"I hear you've a good theme up your sleeve, Carlisle," said Julie, when they had settled down for a chat.

"Peachy!" laughed Carlisle, in fun, with a shrug of her shoulders. But when Julie had gone, she reopened the subject of the literary competition and went to the fireplace to get her notes. When she turned around there was an odd expression upon her face.

"Renée," she said in a breathless voice that made her roommate turn and stare at her, "*you* didn't take my notes out for any reason, did you?"

Renée shook her head, alarm dawning in her eyes. "No! Why, Carlisle?"

"Because," stammered Carlisle, "my—my—notes for the competition are gone!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STOLEN NOTES

GONE!" Unbelievingly, Renée echoed the other's word. She hurried over to the fireplace. "Oh, Ca'lisle, they can't be!" She groped around the chimney ledge until her fingers encountered the empty space where the notes had been.

Carlisle shook her head despairingly, went over to throw herself into an easy chair lately vacated by Julie. "No use to look any more!" she said morosely. "I tell you those theme notes are gone—someone's taken them, that's all!"

Renée faced her. "Ca'lisle, you don't mean to say that you-all think——"

"Go on, say it!" commanded the other bitterly. "Yes, I'm fully convinced that that horrid sneak, Barbara Gainsworth, took them! Why, everything points that way. You certainly wouldn't take them, and Barbara was the only other person who knew where they were!"

"Maybe one of the maids——" began Renée.

"Oh, wake up! What would one of the maids be doing 'way inside the fireplace, Renée?"

"Maybe the notes fell down and got swept out."

"Impossible!" Carlisle shook her head. "That

place was too small—those notes fitted right into a crevice, there. No, someone took them!"

"Oh, Ca'lisle, why didn't you hide them somewhere else, when you knew Barbara knew?" Renée wrung her hands.

"I should have," replied Carlisle sadly. "It's taught me a lesson, all right. After this, the word 'system' is going to be my middle name. I just didn't change that hiding place because I was too mentally lazy to think up some new place! But that doesn't excuse Barbara Gainsworth!" she added, her eyes narrowing. "And that certainly settles her ever getting into Alpha Kappa!"

"But it seems such an ostrichlike thing for Barbara to do!" said Renée, ignoring the issue Carlisle was bringing up. "How can Barbara hope to use your notes?"

"She can twist them around, using the main ideas," explained Carlisle sullenly. "It's called pla-plagiarizing—stealing someone else's ideas!"

There was a little silence; then Renée walked over to seat herself affectionately upon the arm of her room mate's chair. "Carlisle, in spite of all this evidence against Barbara, I don't believe she stole your notes. There must be some other explanation. I wish you wouldn't be the only one to blackball her for Alpha Kappa, as you will be—for everyone else likes her."

Carlisle shook her head stubbornly. "Even if this hadn't happened, I was going to blackball her," she responded in a low voice. "This settles it!"

As the days drifted by and the other girls in Alpha

Kappa, the one secret organization permitted in Harwood Hall, tried to argue with her, Carlisle grew more and more stubborn upon that subject. In vain the others tried to bring up the fact that she was the only one who did not want Barbara in the society, Carlisle only lapsed into sullen silence whenever the subject was mentioned. Julie finally flew away in a rage of tears after pleading in vain with her one day.

Barbara, a few minutes later, looked up in surprise at the angry slam of the door to their room as Julie entered. "What's the matter?" she began quizzically. But, like a small cyclone, Julie swept across the floor to envelop her in a tearful hug.

"Oh, Babs, I'm so *mad!* Carlisle, the mean old thing, swears she won't let you into Alpha Kappa, and it only takes one blackball to keep you out. It just spoils our plans for next year!" she cried.

For an instant a glint came into the cool, dark eyes Barbara bent upon her room mate. She turned rather pale. But when she spoke it was in her usual quiet, curt voice. "Cheer up, Julie! It's no life or death matter!"

"It is! It is!" insisted Julie, rather hysterically. "It's the biggest thing in Harwood. If you're not in Alpha Kappa, you're just not in anything!"

"I haven't been in Alpha Kappa all this year, since I've been here, and I've got along pretty well," began Barbara calmly.

"But you would have been, if you had been here when the new scholars were initiated at the beginning of the school year," said Julie quickly. She flung her-

self across the room and back again. "Oh, it's going to make it horrid! There'll be lots of things I'll want to talk over and can't, because you're not in Alpha Kap!"

Barbara laughed at the other's tragic tone. "Well, I'd love to be in it, of course," she admitted slowly, then. "My mother"—very slowly—"was an Alpha Kappa, long ago! But if I can't be," she shrugged, "Kismet!"

"Kismet?" repeated Julie, puzzled.

"Kismet means fate," explained Barbara. "If it's not to be—it's just not to be, that's all!"

"But it's going to be! Somehow, you're going to be admitted to Alpha Kappa!" And Julie looked as stubborn as Carlisle.

At last came that June day, not only of the sorority meeting, but of Gail Austin's arrival, as well. She was to arrive in the early evening, and all that day every girl was in a twitter of impatience and eager anticipation. The Alpha Kappa girls, late in the afternoon, gathered in Fatty's room to make plans for the evening and to make fudge in Helen's chafing dish. Only Julie was pointedly absent.

"For the luvva Pete!" began Fatty, the fudge maker, in a disgusted tone. "Who put the chocolate in now? I never put it in until the fudge is almost done!"

"I did!" answered Carlisle, sweeping a mocking chord on her ukulele. "It blends better when you put it right in with the butter and sugar and milk!"

"It does *not!*" contradicted Fatty crossly. "It blends lots better when you put the chocolate in last. I always put it in last!"

"So you told us before, Miss Smith! My word, what a beautiful one you have!" interrupted Carlisle admiringly. "Where'd you get it, Fatty?"

"Get what?" Fatty sniffed.

"That grouch!" And Carlisle swung off into loud music to drown out Fatty's indignant reply.

Helen, who was peaceably cracking nuts over on the window ledge, looked up. "Tell 'em, Fatty," she suggested. "Then maybe they'll understand the 'grouch'!"

"Tell what?" Carlisle laid down her ukulele, and the other girls looked interested.

"Well, you might as well know, now," said Fatty grimly. "I was going to wait until you'd had some fudge to sweeten the shock. The Alpha Kappa doesn't meet to-night, after all!"

"Why not?" "Oh, Fatty, who told you?" "Well, of all things!" The chorus of cries that greeted this announcement were interrupted by Carlisle, who repeated quietly, "Why doesn't it meet to-night, Fatty?"

"Miss Luval has forbidden it, that's why not!" answered Fatty, truculent because of her own keen disappointment. "She met me in the hall awhile ago and thought I was the High Plankety Plank, I guess. Must have gotten me mixed with you, Carlisle. Anyway, she said that it would create too much confusion,

on the first night of Mrs. Austin's arrival, and that we must postpone the meeting."

"But everything's ready!" protested Carlisle, in dismay. "Miss Nancy and I worked like everything to get the trunk room ready this afternoon!"

The trunk room, a vast, low-ceilinged room used as a storage place for the pupils' luggage throughout the school terms, twice a year was sacred to the sorority's initiations. In fact, Gail Austin herself had been initiated in that very place into Alpha Kappa.

Now Carlisle sat with drawn brows, and a gloomy silence had settled over Fatty's room, when heavy footsteps were heard approaching in the corridor, outside, followed by a deep voice demanding admittance.

For an instant no one moved. Each girl glanced fearfully at her neighbor, while several guilty consciences stirred in memory of certain pranks.

"That window I broke in Gym!" murmured Fatty. "I was going to report as soon as my allowance came! But now she's found out!"

"She told me yesterday to report to Miss Luval for leaving my rubbers downstairs," muttered Phyllis Haveron.

"Young lay-dees!" The stern voice came again. And at a rattle of the doorknob, Helen gave a nervous jump, then broke into a suppressed wail.

"The nuts!" she leaned out of the window. "They've fallen! Oh, dear—I had 'em in a little wooden bowl. And they've fallen! Why on earth did you lock that door, Fatty! That looks suspicious, to begin with!"

"I didn't!" denied Fatty crossly.

"I did!" murmured Carlisle. She looked around her wildly. "Turn off the electricity under this chafing dish—here, give it to me! I'll stick it under the bed! Take a towel, Renée, and try to blow the odor of candy toward the window. You never know how Old Constitution's going to take things—she might let us get away with this fudge making, then again she might remember that obsolete rule of no food in the room except fruit! There, open the door before it comes down!" For the knocking was being carried on with increasing severity.

As everyone settled back quiveringly, Fatty strode to the door and threw it open.

"Well, who would have thought I could have fooled you all for the *second* time!" grinned Julie, looking around mischievously at the breathless faces confronting her.

"Of all things!" began Fatty wrathfully. Then she caught up a pillow and began to pummel Julie.

"Enough!" shrieked Julie. "Remember, I'm only a poor invalid, yet! I'll be good, Fatty, honestly!"

"You certainly will be good!" agreed Fatty sternly, with another biff or two. "And just to prove it, you'll march right downstairs and pick up every single nut meat you made Helen spill——"

"*I* made Helen spill!" interrupted Julie aggrievedly. But she fled before the threatening pillow Fatty raised again.

"Silly child!" laughed Carlisle, pulling out the fudge dish. "She has a perfect mania for trying to make

us believe she's Mrs. Lawtry. Connect this with that socket, will you, Phyllis! But Julie must have inherited some of her mother's talent for acting, because she fools us every time. I could have sworn that that was Old Constitution battering on that door!"

"Say, Carlisle," said Fatty suddenly, in a low tone, "why can't we get Julie to ask her mother about to-night? If Mrs. Austin gets here in time, she might persuade Miss Luval she isn't tired—I mean, that it won't tire her to have a sorority meeting held, and——"

"But it will be noisy!" said Carlisle doubtfully. "The trunk room is directly over the morning room, and that's where Miss Luval always takes her house guests!"

"Well, it won't hurt to try!" concluded Fatty sturdily. "If Mrs. Austin gets here before dinner, I'm going to speak to Julie about it."

When Julie returned with the bowl of nuts, the girls surrounded her with anxious faces. "The nuts are all right—not hurt a bit!" she informed them, a little astonished by their solicitude.

"Never mind the nuts!" said Fatty impressively. "Say, Julie, do you think you could fix it up with your mother, if she arrives early enough, so she would persuade Miss Luval to let us go ahead with Alpha Kappa initiation to-night?"

"Why—aren't we going ahead with the meeting?" Julie stared at them.

Several voices explained the situation to her impatiently. When they had all finished and were standing

around her with eager gaze upon her face, Julie studied the floor for a brief moment. When she raised her own gaze to their combined one, hers held a certain grim determination.

"I'll get Mother to let us hold that meeting by having her persuade Miss Luval it won't matter to her if Carlisle will promise not to blackball Barbara's name when it comes up for membership," she compromised.

There was a little strained pause, then Helen shook her head, even as Carlisle commenced to shake hers. "You can't work anybody into Alpha Kappa that way, Julie," she said quietly. "She has to be admitted without anyone's having been coerced into wanting her."

Fatty gave a short laugh. "Guess it's all off with the meeting to-night, then," she said gruffly.

But Julie had turned toward the door. "Oh, all right," she said sulkily. "I'll get Mother to speak to Miss Luval!"

When she had disappeared, Fatty looked meaningly at Carlisle. "Just the same, I think you're kinda hard on the child," she said bluntly. "It means a lot to her to have Barbara in Alpha Kappa!"

"It means a lot to Barbara, too," answered Carlisle coolly. "And if you knew what I know," her eyes met Renée's significantly, "you'd be as anxious as I am to see that she doesn't get what she wants!"

"I don't see what you can know about a nice girl like Barbara—to say a thing like that!" cried Fatty defensively.

But Carlisle would only shrug her shoulders and look mysterious—a tantalizing attitude that nearly drove the other girls wild.

That evening, true to her promise, after the ecstatic greeting between Julie and her mother at the station, when they were seated side by side on the back seat of Miss Nancy's little sedan, Julie burst out with her plea.

"It'll just spoil everything, Moth', if we're not allowed to hold that meeting to-night! Won't you tell Miss Luval that you won't mind a bit if we go ahead?"

Mrs. Austin laughed happily as she glanced down at the rosy, eager, young face beside her, the face she had last seen so pale and wan upon Julie's pillow in the Infirmary. Perhaps that was one reason her "I'll see" was so prompt. Anyway, Julie was satisfied, for always her mother's "I'll see" had been as good as anyone's else promise.

Sure enough, just before dinner, Mrs. Austin managed to whisper into her daughter's ear, "It's all right, dear! Tell the girls to go ahead with their fun, and perhaps Miss Luval and I will look in on them later!"

Night, therefore, found the old trunk room filled with mysterious figures. In the center of the room, a cleared space had been achieved by pushing back the trunks, and here glowed a realistic fire beneath a cauldron, accomplished by red electric bulbs. Over the cauldron bent an ancient witch, while a slim page hovered near by, though most of the members wore sheets and pillow cases.

At last Miss Nancy, the faculty member, clad like the others in sheet and pillow case, looked down at her wrist watch. "Everyone's here," she said in a low voice to the ancient hag. "Why not begin, Carlisle?"

"Sure everyone's here?" whispered back Carlisle.

"Just counted them," nodded Miss Nancy.

So, with a wave of her hand for the others to be seated, the old witch advanced to the iron pot suspended over the red "fire." "I am the High Plankety Plank, of this Alpha Kappa!" began the witch in a shrill, cracked voice. She bent and shook as though with palsy.

"Aye! Aye!" droned the other members.

"I am the High Judge, the Keeper of the Ballot," went on the witch whiningly. As she leaned upon her stick, Renée had a sudden memory of that terrible old woman who had lunged at her with an umbrella in Jackson Square on that long ago morning. How much had happened since then! Renée shuddered, though, if it were known, not a few of the other members shuddered, also, at Carlisle's realistic acting. "I warn ye," screeched the old witch, the next instant. "I warn ye all—have due respect for my words and office!" She whirled away from the pot suddenly to point her stick at one stout member, who visibly started.

"Why—p-pick on me!" demanded Fatty indignantly.

"Hush! Hush!" came from all over the room. And Fatty relapsed into sheeted silence.

"Know ye, therefore, we are met this night to decide whether to admit four new members to this, our

society—one Pauline, one Hannah, one Adele, and—one Barbara!" The witch gestured vaguely, and as she did so, the sleeve of her long, ragged gown fell away to reveal a white, rounded arm. This incongruity of costume detail offended the witch's sense of the dramatic, and hastily she dropped her arm and bent over the cauldron.

"Know ye that one blackball will disqualify any member," she presently droned on. "Know ye that one member, once admitted, must be loved, must be honored, must be kept tryst with through all the years to come, so long as she shall live. And so must she do with us, her sisters in Alpha Kappa! Page, the ballots!"

While the slim page, Renée, distributed the ballots and pencils, Carlisle stood lost in thought. Could she honestly admit Barbara, love her, honor her through the years to come, because the others wanted her to?

"No, no!" she cried to herself, clenching her hands beneath her long, cotton robe. Then, before she marked her own ballot, while Renée gathered up those marked by the other members, in order to give herself more time to think, Carlisle turned and threw some salt into the cauldron, then caught up the little bottle of alcohol to pour over the salt. This combination produced a queer, bluish flame, and was permitted, although it was rather dangerous, because of Miss Nancy's protecting presence.

But to-night, in her nervous excitement, Carlisle forgot to catch back that long, cotton sleeve of hers! As the alcohol ignited, a long, blue flame suddenly

shot from the pot. There was a gasp, a shriek, and the witch's cotton gown was afire!

Madly, Carlisle jerked at her costume. Miss Nancy, seated Turkish fashion upon the floor, tried to get to her feet; but her sheet costume hindered her, and before she could reach Carlisle the girl had darted from the circle, a panic of fear sending her headlong she knew not whither. There was a tug at the trunk-room door, the terrified witnesses saw her disappear then, a flaming human torch!

Down the corridor fled Carlisle—the flames, fanned into greater activity, seemed to tear at her throat, to snake across her shoulders. Where to go? How to get away from that agony of fear and hurt?

But a tall figure near "Miss Melissa's room" had heard those flying feet, had turned around, and when Carlisle swept past, Barbara Gainsworth threw herself upon her and bore her to the ground. Panting, beating at the cruel flames with both hands, Barbara, somehow, managed to smother them. And when the others, including Mrs. Austin and Miss Luval, reached her, everyone pale and horrified, the fire was out.

"She's—she's——" Barbara pulled herself to her feet.

"Only unconscious from fright, I think, and not too terribly burned, thanks to your presence of mind, Barbara," answered Miss Luval simply. "Send the girls to their rooms, Nancy! Ah, Miss Cameron, there you are! Can we get this child to the Infirmary without too much fuss?"

Miss Cameron tore away the blackened gown.

"Not as badly burned as I was afraid," she announced, after a hasty examination. "Quick action on someone's part! Better send for Dr. Bradbury, though, Miss Luval. It's mainly Carlisle's right hand and arm and her neck. Otherwise, I think that it won't be so serious!"

As though by magic, the hall was cleared, and by the time the doctor had arrived Carlisle, very lime watery and oily, was conscious. But it was not until the next morning that Barbara came tiptoeing into the Infirmary to stand bashfully beside Carlisle's bed and smile down at her.

Carlisle choked a little. "Barbara——" All at once she glanced at the bandaged hands Barbara was trying to hide behind her. "Brave hands!" she said. "Oh, *Barbara!*"

The next morning a new excitement swept the school, already tense from the strain of the competition, the terrible fright Carlisle had given them, and vague new reports of the White Lady's walking in the night.

Mrs. Austin and Julie had strolled to the guest-room window. "Let's go out," proposed Julie.

"The flooring of that balcony looks old, dear—think it's quite safe?" objected Mrs. Austin doubtfully, glancing out at the ground, a number of feet below.

"Of course!" said Julie, stepping out. Her mother followed her.

The next instant Mr. Atterton, at work a short distance away in the garden below, heard a terrific splin-

tering sound. He glanced up, saw a white face staring down at him.

"Gail! Gail!" he cried, leaping forward. "Go back!"

Then, as Julie and her mother jumped back to safety, Mr. Atterton, carried forward by his own impetus, went down beneath the falling timbers of the old balcony!

Julie turned a horror-stricken face toward her mother. "Poor Mr. Atterton!" she whispered. "He's hurt!"

Gail Austin sprang toward the door. *"Mr. Atterton!"* she cried hysterically. "Oh, Julie, Julie—*he's your father!"*

CHAPTER XIX

VINDICATION

JULIE AUSTIN, stumbling after her mother almost mechanically, found that already rescuers were at work upon the débris beneath the guest-room window. The injured man had been extricated and carried into his immaculate little room in the school basement and there placed upon his cot by pitying hands by the time they had fled pell-mell down the two flights of stairs to reach him. Gail Austin, glancing around at the bareness of that little room, drew a quick, shuddering breath as she knelt beside the cot.

"John! John!" she murmured.

As Julie watched, standing stiff and constrained beside Miss Luval, who had hastened down to her guest, she saw the injured man's eyelids flutter, saw him open his eyes and stare unbelievingly up into her mother's face. Then a slow, wondering smile overspread his. He made a vague motion with his hand.

"Where's the baby?" he murmured weakly. "Where's Baby Julie?"

Gail Austin, fighting against overpowering emotion, suddenly broke down. She turned and pointed to the staring girl beside Miss Luval. "There!" whispered Julie's mother, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"There's your baby—oh, John, fifteen years and not a word from you!"

"But I——" began John Austin, and stopped. There was a little stir as good Dr. Bradbury entered, then silence as the doctor quickly went over him with swift fingers.

"He is not injured, beyond bruises," announced Dr. Bradbury finally, in a cheerful tone. "A lucky escape, Mr. Atterton!"

"My name is John Austin, sir," returned the other man with dignity. "I—I do not know how I got here," he looked around the poor little room he had occupied for the last eight or nine years with a puzzled expression. "I was on my way home to Connecticut the last that I remember."

The doctor hushed Miss Luval's involuntary exclamation, and Gail Austin, still upon her knees beside her husband's cot, stifled a sob. "Go on, John!" she whispered.

"I had that money due Aunt Calista—my aunt, sir, with whom we had been living following a breakdown in my health." The injured man glanced at the doctor, who nodded keenly. "I had collected a sum of money due on her mortgage." John Austin paused, knitted his brows. One could almost imagine him pulling these details one by one from that clogged memory as though by tremendous physical effort. "I had come from Brooklyn and was on my way uptown to the Grand Central Terminal to catch my train. Ah, now I—I—remember! It was dark—four men—a blow—darkness!" He gasped. And his hearers' faces tensed.

They could almost see that struggle. "Darkness!" repeated John Austin wearily. "Fifteen years of darkness! Ah, Gail, it is unbelievable!"

"This is most remarkable," said the doctor, stepping back to Miss Luval, as Gail Austin, with a low cry, bent over her husband's pillow. "A clear case of aphasia, induced by a blow that some thugs must have inflicted upon Mr. Atterton—Austin, I mean. He was probably blackjacked for that sum of money he mentions. Those balcony timbers, crashing down upon him have evidently released some slight bone pressure and thus restored his memory. Very interesting case—oh, remarkably interesting!"

Miss Luval nodded silently, her eyes upon the reunited couple. To her it was not interesting—it was miraculous, wonderful!

Suddenly Mr. Austin started up. "Aunt Calista's money—that mortgage money! And my disappearance!" he groaned. "Ah, all these years she must have thought me a thief, must have thought I had absconded with the money! I must repay her—I must repay her!"

Gail Austin pushed him gently back upon his pillow. "Lie still, my darling and rest awhile!" she said pitifully. "The money was all repaid long years ago—every cent, John dear!"

"You paid it, Gail?" Her husband looked at her unbelievingly. "Eight thousand dollars, Gail?"

She nodded hurriedly. "But it wasn't the money, John," she said sadly. "It was the uncertainty! Always, everywhere I went I looked for you and—al-

ways I was disappointed. I thought perhaps you might see my picture upon the screen, might write to me, telling me where you were! But year after year it was only silence that came, and all I had was the memory of that last morning with you, when I walked as far as that old cemetery with Baby Julie in my arms —do you remember?—and waited until the stage had carried you out of sight, around the bend in the road!"

Julie crept over to her mother's side. "Oh, Moth' —was that why you cried that night, when we passed the old cemetery on our way to Aunt C'listie's?'

Mrs. Austin nodded, placed a finger upon her lips as she glanced toward the careworn face upon John Austin's pillow.

"How do you think you ever happened to come here, to this school, John?" she asked. "And why should you—a college man—have done this work, my dear?"

Mr. Austin opened his eyes. "Some vague memory must have told me it was the school you knew and loved as a girl," he said, brushing a hand across his forehead, as though the cobwebs were not all yet cleared away. "As for the work—why, it was honorable work, my dearest!" He paused, sighed. Then becoming cognizant of Julie's presence beside her mother, he looked at her. "Is this—Julie?" Slow, painful tears filled his eyes. "My—little—girl, Julie?"

Julie, at that, placed her cool, slim hand upon her father's work-gnarled one. She turned and looked up at her mother, and the tears were in her eyes, too.

"*Now* we can have our little dream house—can't we, Moth'?" she asked tremulously.

And in the silence that followed a door could have been heard closing softly after Miss Luval and Dr. Bradbury.

That afternoon a throng assembled in the big study hall of Harwood Hall. Mr. Chartres had surprised his little ward by arriving unexpectedly from New Orleans, and Barbara had uttered a shriek of delight when she had spied a tall, fine-looking man being welcomed by Miss Luval in the hall just before luncheon, and had flown down the stairs to throw her bandaged hands rapturously around his neck.

Now only a rustle of fans broke the silence as Barbara got up to read her competition theme. Renée, glancing over at Carlisle's empty seat, settled herself to listen a little grimly. She was to read Carlisle's theme, following Barbara upon the programme; but she resolved that even though the two girls had at last become friends, should Barbara's theme prove to have been written from Carlisle's notes, she would get up and denounce her!

When Barbara finished reading there was silence, the sort of silence that is tribute, then quick, sharp applause, while a flush of pride surged over Mr. Gainsworth's face. But Renée grew rather white, as she glanced down at the papers in her hand, for thought for thought, almost word for word, the two compositions were alike! Yet, as she sat there, waiting for Miss Luval to announce her name and explain that she was taking Carlisle's place, panic swept through her.

Oh, she could not do that odious task she had set herself! She simply could not get up before all of these people assembled here, before Miss Luval and Miss Nancy and Mr. Chartres and Barbara's proudly smiling father and Gail Austin, and denounce dear, happy-faced Barbara for a thief!

But another sidelong glance at Carlisle's empty seat, the memory of her hard work rewriting those stolen notes, steeled Renée's wavering resolution, and when Miss Luval, from the platform, announced that Carlisle's room mate would now read her theme in her place, Renée got up slowly from her seat and gazed with such troubled eyes at her principal that Miss Luval was arrested. She paused in the act of reseating herself.

"What is it, dear?" she asked involuntarily.

Everyone leaned forward. A sudden strange tension was apparent in the big room.

"Miss Luval, I—" Renée gulped—"I must charge Barbara Gainsworth with stealing her theme idea from Carlisle Martin's notes. I read the—the—notes that Carlisle wrote, that were stolen later—and—and they are in Barbara's theme, almost word for word!" Her voice died away into miserable silence as she stood twisting her fingers unhappily, her eyes fixed upon the floor.

Amazement was upon every face, most of all upon Barbara's, as Miss Luval was quick to note. The principal turned her kind gaze back to Renée.

"Surely, dear, you are mistaken!" she said gently. "We all know Barbara would not stoop to such an act

as the one you charge her with! I'm sure you will withdraw it and read Carlisle's theme for us, now?"

But Renée shook her head. "Carlisle's theme is exactly like Barbara's," she answered. "It would be like hearing Barbara's read over again!" She straightened her shoulders with sudden determination, as Mr. Chartres carefully kept his eyes from Mr. Gainsworth's face. "No, Miss Luval, I cannot withdraw my accusation," she said simply. "Barbara must explain how she happened to obtain her idea. These notes were stolen, and—and she was the only other person who knew where they had been hidden, besides Carlisle and myself."

Mr. Gainsworth was upon his feet. "I am sure Barbara can explain this strange charge to everyone's satisfaction!" he said sternly, as Miss Luval and Miss Nancy exchanged distressed glances. "Speak, my daughter!"

Miss Luval gave an unhappy gesture. "How dreadful, when you were the one to donate——" she began. She stopped. Mr. Gainsworth had begged for silence with an uplifted hand. But everyone knew who had bestowed the competition prizes!

Miss Luval was upon her feet. "Won't you tell us, Barbara, how you happened to think of your theme idea?" she begged.

But Barbara, rising slowly, dazedly to her feet, only shook her head. "I—I can't explain! I'm sorry!"

Surprise deepened into shocked amazement upon Mr. Gainsworth's face, upon Mr. Chartres's face,

upon everyone's face. Miss Luval spoke slowly and carefully.

"Are you sure, Barbara? See, we are all waiting to hear." She looked imploringly at the girl.

Barbara, however, shook her head despairingly. "I—I found the notes!" she stammered. "But—oh, I can't explain!" Infinitely pathetic, she stood there ashamed, yet oddly bewildered.

Now a little murmur went stirring through the audience. Fatty, seated behind Barbara, leaned forward and touched her upon the arm. *"Speak true! Right wrong!"* she quoted, with passionate earnestness. "Oh, Barbara, tell them! Tell them you're not a thief!"

But Barbara only shook her head again, hopelessly, and sat down. Upon the platform a buzz of conversation arose. Miss Luval turned agitatedly to Mr. Gainsworth, as he sat with his troubled gaze fixed upon his daughter's pale face.

"I am sure that the child can explain!" she whispered. "There is certainly some terrible mistake here, for no scholar has proved more industrious or more beloved than has Barbara!"

"Thank you, Miss Luval!" Mr. Gainsworth spoke with formality. "I, too, have enough faith in Barbara, as her dear mother's daughter, to know that this affair can be explained somehow!"

Mr. Chartres, who had been squirming about on his chair in displeased silence, now got to his feet, and, advancing to the edge of the platform, he waited for the buzz of conversation to cease. When quiet came, he spoke directly to Renée.

"My dear," he said earnestly, "I beg of you to withdraw this charge against Barbara!"

But Renée, looking back up at him with tears in her eyes, shook her head. "How can I," she demanded huskily, yet steadily, "when Barbara has not yet proved her innocence?"

Again that murmur of pity swept over the assembly. Suddenly, however, a new voice spoke from behind Renée. It was Julie, who, all this time, had been sitting with bent head, her thoughtful, troubled eyes fixed upon her lap. Now she rose slowly to her feet, while every head craned in her direction.

"Miss Luval," she began respectfully, "if Barbara cannot explain all of this, I think I can!"

Miss Luval made an impulsive gesture. "My dear, do continue, if you can explain! I feel sure that it can be done!" she nodded.

Julie turned imperatively to Barbara. "Have you that French examination paper, Babs, that you showed me one night a long time ago?" she demanded, as Renée sat down, to lean back with an air of relief in her seat. Everyone else settled into attitudes of closest attention. "You remember the one I mean, don't you?" continued Julie. "It was a paper that Carlisle wrote and that Mademoiselle returned to you. Oh, Babs," desperately, "you must remember it!"

Barbara, who had at first looked blank, now nodded. "That paper is pasted into my Memory Book, I think," she answered.

Julie turned quickly to the principal. "May I send

for the book, please, Miss Luval?" she asked quietly. Miss Luval gave immediate permission.

"Thank you," said Julie. She glanced around. "Fatty," she continued, "will you go up to our room as—as quickly as you can and get her Memory Book —the one we were looking at the other night? It is on Barbara's desk."

"Why p-pick on m-m-me?" began Fatty, from sheer force of habit. Then she blushed and scrambled to her feet. "Certainly, Julie!" she acquiesced hastily. Hating to miss the slightest detail of this exciting scene, she disappeared upon a heavy run, while amused smiles were exchanged among the audience upon the platform.

"Now," Julie turned back to Mr. Gainsworth, "Barbara has been upset over this competition, talking and groaning every night in her sleep, you know! I've heard her! And lately, especially, it was always about the literary contest.

"One morning, to her surprise, she found a lot of papers, written upon in her handwriting, lying beside her bed. We had just been reading of that strange incident—or legend, I don't know which!—about Julia Ward Howe, about her getting up in her sleep and writing the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.' Well—" Julie's voice faltered, swept on again—"we thought Barbara had done the same thing. So she—used the notes. We were both quite sure, you see, about her having written them herself. Oh, thank you, Fatty!" Julie interrupted herself to say, taking the big book the stout girl was holding out to her.

There was a little stir as Julie then carried the book up to the edge of the platform and handed it to Mr. Gainsworth, with her slim finger pointing to the French exercise in question. As Julie retreated to beside her desk, Mr. Gainsworth studied the paper.

"Don't you agree with me, sir, that that paper appears to be in Barbara's handwriting?" asked the young girl at last.

Mr. Gainsworth nodded slowly and handed the book to Miss Luval, indicating the paper in question as he did so. Miss Luval also nodded emphatically.

"I'd swear anywhere that that was in my daughter's handwriting," said Mr. Gainsworth, then.

"It was written by Carlisle Martin and was handed back to Barbara by the French teacher after class because it was unsigned and the teacher thought it was Barbara's," answered Julie.

There was a tense silence, then Miss Luval voiced the question uppermost in everyone's mind.

"But how did those notes, written by Carlisle, happen to be upon the floor beside Barbara's bed one morning instead of where Carlisle had placed them?" asked the principal, leaning forward.

Julie looked at her squarely. "Because Barbara is a sleepwalker and must have taken them in her sleep!" she returned, in a distinct tone.

Miss Luval turned in genuine amazement to Barbara's father. "Mr. Gainsworth, is this true?" she demanded.

He nodded at once. "Yes, Miss Luval, it is true—at least, true of her as a child, when excitement or

worry caused her to walk in her sleep," he answered. "For years, however, she has had no recurrence of somnambulism, and I was hoping she had outgrown it. I am very sorry to hear that she has been walking in her sleep again."

"But," broke in Julie, "if Barbara took those notes, she did it without conscious knowledge! And I, for one, know that she is the dearest and best and most honorable girl in the world!" And with a little sound, half-laugh, half-sob, Julie ran forward a few paces to throw her arms around her room mate's neck, who hugged her silently, while the other pupils, carried away by excitement, surged out of their desks around the two, clapping their hands.

When at last Miss Luval had succeeded in restoring order, she looked around her smilingly.

"If this is true of Barbara," she commenced, "and," glancing at Mr. Gainsworth, "I, for one, am convinced that it is true about Barbara's walking in her sleep, then I think we have solved, not only the mystery of the missing notes, but the mystery of the White Lady! Barbara must have been the White Lady, all this time!"

Renée spoke out of a breathless silence. "I, too, am convinced that Barbara took Carlisle's notes while asleep and believed them to be her own," she said, with a loyal glance at her classmate, "but," the little Southern girl knit her brows, "how did the White Lady—or Barbara—get upstairs, downstairs so quickly? She could not have used the stairways, for we watched. Yet she appeared upon two different floors almost at

the same time. Ca'lisle's and my room is in the Old House, you know, Miss Luval—and one night we saw her near us, then an instant later she was on the next floor—a process that would have taken any of us, descending or ascending by the stairway, a moment or so, at least!"

It was Barbara who answered before anyone else could speak. "Could I have used the secret stairs, I wonder?" she asked almost mechanically.

Miss Luval and Miss Nancy exchanged startled glances. "What do you know of the secret stairs, Barbara?" Miss Luval leaned forward, speaking gently. "I thought no one knew of the existence of those stairs but my sister and myself!"

"I've always known about them, ever since I was a tiny girl, for the discovery of them by my mother when she was a pupil here years and years ago formed one of my favorite stories," said Barbara simply. "They are built into the wall of the Old House and lead from that closet near the morning room up through the wall into a closet in 'Miss Melissa's room,' do they not?" She looked inquiringly at Miss Luval, who could only nod in a surprised way. "You remember Mother telling me about them, don't you, Dad, when I was little?" Barbara turned to her father. "It was over in Italy, the first time—we were speaking about the ancient buildings over there, and that got Mother started upon some of the interesting old houses she had seen over here—the House of the Seven Gables, with its secret stairway, and this old house. We never dreamed, then, that I should be a pupil here, like her-

self. Indeed, I think I remembered those secret stairs of 'Miss Melissa's' only in my sleep!"

"I remember your mother telling you about the secret stairs," confirmed Mr. Gainsworth. "That is quite true, Miss Luval." He turned ceremoniously to the school principal.

"Then," cried Miss Luval triumphantly, "the mystery of the White Lady is truly solved!"

"Well," sighed Fatty audibly, "thank goodness, *that's* settled! The legend of the White Lady roaming upstairs, downstairs is only a legend, after all!"

Later, after the afternoon's exercises were over, the four girls who were most interested—Barbara, Julie, Renée, and Fatty—stole away from their friends and classmates and met Miss Nancy at the door to the morning room.

"All here?" she inquired cheerfully. "Yes, except Carlisle, of course! Now, remember, girls, if I do show you the old staircase, not a word to the rest of the pupils—not a word to anyone! Miss Luval is going to have the entrances walled up, so that hereafter there shall be no temptation left in the paths of wandering young ladies." And she glanced mischievously at Barbara.

Barbara grinned back at her. "That's good!" she commended heartily.

Eagerly they followed Miss Nancy, then, into the closet adjacent to the morning room. Yes, there was the little, low door at its rear and, when it was opened in turn and Miss Nancy's flashlight sent its rays in that

direction, there was revealed the narrow winding stairway beyond!

"Who wants to go first?" asked the teacher in a teasing voice.

No one did—not even Barbara! Each girlish heart beat a little faster at the mystery and darkness confronting her. So it was Miss Nancy who led the way with her flashlight, then the others stumbled, breathless and giggling, up and around the stairs until, all of a sudden, at the teacher's command, they bent their heads at another low doorway, passed through a long closet, and found themselves in 'Miss Melissa's room.'

"Golly-gosh, it's really true!" ejaculated Fatty, with a droll sniff, staring around her and back at the doorway through which she had just passed. "Those secret stairs are real!"

"You've just proved them so, my dear," returned Miss Nancy, with a smile, dropping into a wing chair.

"But—what was the real story of the White Lady and—and who was Miss Melissa?" asked Julie inquisitively, plumping herself down upon the floor before Miss Nancy. The others followed suit.

"Lily-Belle told us awhile ago she was the 'lubly bride dat died o' grief in de Old House when de Yanks got her husband,' " interrupted Fatty.

"It's a sad little story," answered Miss Nancy, sighing. "Miss Melissa was the young and beautiful daughter of the house, and I imagine this room was once a very happy room, where she must have slept and dreamed of the brave lover who was the son of one of her father's best friends. When they were mar-

ried, the whole town rejoiced—the wedding was the most gorgeous of that decade, and Miss Melissa went to her husband's great plantation home with every expectation of living a useful and wealthy and happy life. But the war came—and how dreadful it must have been down here, where brother actually fought against brother—and the big plantation was devastated! Miss Melissa came home, to stay while her young husband was off fighting. He never came back, however, and the poor bride did indeed die of grief. But"—here Miss Nancy's tone grew stern—"she never walked abroad as the White Lady, you may be sure—that was only the foolish superstition of the Negro servants at that time, and the tale was only built up because of the rather tragic circumstances of her life, as all such tales are first started. Barbara's meanderings gave it credence, of course—it just shows how little it takes to start silly gossip! But now I want you all to promise me that you will give every like story full investigation before you join in any hysteria—every episode I have ever encountered has always been explained in the end by some logical, physical reason. Will you try, girls?"

When they had nodded, Miss Nancy jumped up. "Come," she said, "look around you! And remember that this was the room of a happy girl like one of yourselves, who sewed and read and doubtless leaned out of yonder window to gaze out into the sunny garden below."

Fatty drew a long breath. "Why, it is!" she remarked in a tone of puzzled wonder. "It is just a

room, after all, isn't it! Sort of nice, too, with its pretty furniture."

"Of course!" laughed Miss Nancy. "Hereafter, let's call it a guest room, shall we?"

Again they nodded. And when they filed out after Miss Nancy, not one girl glanced over her shoulder. For Miss Melissa's room had truly become, during the friendly half hour, merely a guest room, full of afternoon sunshine and happy comradeship.

Comradeship was the predominating note once more, too, when, still later, just before the tea bell rang to summon parents and pupils to the big dining room for informal refreshments, the same quartette of bright-faced girls gathered around Carlisle Martin's bed in the Infirmary. They had merely giggled defiance at Miss Cameron's laughing attempts to shoo them out, and she had departed, with a resigned gesture. Now, after Mr. Gainsworth had also left—having been dragged in by an eager Barbara to meet Carlisle—they had all settled down into gay discussion of summer plans.

"Better change your mind, Julie, and get your father and mother to let you come with us on the yacht this summer!" implored Barbara, at last, one bandaged hand in Julie's clasp, the other held by a smiling Carlisle, whose own bandaged head and neck looked odd and grotesque upon her flat hospital pillow; but whose eyes crinkled, every now and then, with happy thoughts.

Julie shook her head firmly. "All the sea trips on all the yachts in the world couldn't tempt me this sum-

mer!" she exclaimed, starry-eyed. "We are going to stay with Aunt C'listie for awhile, Dad and Mother and I, until Dad gets stronger—then we're going to find our little dream house!" She paused a moment in ecstatic mental contemplation of that dream house, while the others gazed at her sympathetically. Then she turned to Barbara. "But wasn't it jolly—Dad and your father turning out to be old boyhood chums!" she cried.

Barbara nodded silently, her dark eyes shining. "The whole blessed thing is like a fairy tale!" she agreed, then.

Carlisle peered dreamily between her bandages at Julie. "How *can* you refuse such a gorgeous invitation—to spend the whole summer on a yacht, in Europe, Julie!" she questioned. "But perhaps dream houses can be just as wonderful!" She paused. "Barbara—your father!" she stammered. "Is it—is it really true that—that he has invited my mother and Bobbie to go with us? I can't believe it," she added shyly, when Barbara nodded and smiled down at her. "It's like a dream—no, like a fairy tale, as you said—the idea that we are going to see France and Italy and England! Oh, Barbara and Renée and Fatty, aren't we going to have fun!"

"Who? Me?" asked the stout girl, in a startled tone. Poor Fatty had been sitting in rather forlorn silence, listening to the others' happy plans.

Barbara turned to her quickly. "Oh, Fatty," she cried remorsefully, "I forgot to tell you. Dad has wired, with Miss Luval's consent, to ask your people

if you can come with us this summer. Mrs. Martin is going to chaperone us—that is, we think she is going to, for Dad hasn't heard from Mr. Martin, yet! But oh—it *will* be fun!"

Fatty's eyes opened wide. "Golly-gosh!" she exclaimed. Then she sobered. "But will there be room for all of us on that yacht?" she inquired anxiously.

Barbara laughed. "Of course! *The Golden Hope* carries a crew of twenty men. Yes, of course there will be room, and to spare!"

Renée sighed luxuriously. "The nicest part of it all, I think—besides Mr. Chartres and me being invited to go—I'm so glad your father thinks you need a sea trip for your nerves, to make you stop walking in your sleep, Babs!—the nicest part of it all," said Renée slowly, happily, "is this—we're not any of us going to be *lonely* any more!"

VF

THE END

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